天地無用！魎皇鬼

ハワイの休日

長谷川菜穂子

イラスト　大和田直之

富士見ファンタジア文庫

Tenchi Muyo! Ryo-Ohki

Hawaiian Holiday

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Novel 9

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Chapter One:

The Eternal Summer Paradise, Hawaii.

The eternal summer paradise, Hawaii.
The eternal resort, Hawaii.
Hawaii, where newlywed couples gather in the shade of palm trees and you bump into a Japanese person every three steps.
Hawaii where grandpa, grandma, mom, dad, everyone shows up in aloha shirts.
It was in early summer—early July, when Japan was still deep in the rainy season—that Tenchi and the Masaki family party set foot in this earthly paradise.
"Tenchi… I'm so happy. Just the two of us on a honeymoon! Ah, a tropical paradise, the blue sea, a sweet night alone together…"
"As if!!"
No sooner had they arrived than the first princess of the Jurai royal family, Princess Ayeka, drove her iron fist into the back of Ryoko's head.
"Where do you come up with such shameless ideas! What's all this talk about a honeymoon? You've lived seven hundred years—stop saying things like some ordinary girl!"
"Ow…"
Ryoko, who had been clinging to Tenchi's arm, rubbed her head and turned around.
"I was just getting into the mood. Is there no freedom of speech here? Do you get arrested by the CIA for telling a lie? Besides, if you're going to say that, you're seven hundred and twenty years old yourself."
"Don't bring up my age!!"
Tenchi looked around at the early-morning Honolulu airport and whispered.
"How many times do I have to tell you? Once we step outside the house, we're ordinary Japanese people. Fighting is strictly forbidden. You two are the Masaki family's relatives, and Kiyone and the others are their friends. We'll be here four

nights and six days, and the hotel has other tour guests too, so we all need to restrain ourselves from acting on our own. Is that understood?"
"Yeah yeah, I know."
Ryoko waved her hand as if it were a bother.
In fact, she had heard the list of travel precautions until she had ears full of it.
"I mean, we finally came to this tropical paradise, and it's barely any different from being at home."
"That's not true. The air feels like summer."
Sasami looked around the arrivals lobby with curious eyes.
"Sasami-chan, are you all right? Were you worn out from all that flying?"
"No. But what about you, big sis?"
Sasami looked back at Kiyone's haggard face.
"I'm perfectly fine."
Mihoshi, looking well-rested, answered on her behalf.
"Of course you're fine. You ate all the in-flight meals, and no sooner had you finished eating than you were fast asleep. I couldn't sleep a wink because I was so aware of everything around me."
"Well, since we've arrived safely, let's forget about what happened on the plane."
Nobuyuki offered his support.
"Is the shuttle bus here yet?"
Katsuhito stood alone with perfect composure.
In truth, during the seven-hour flight from Osaka to Honolulu, there had already been several near-crises.
There was the incident where a drunk Ryoko shook her fist in Ayeka's face across Tenchi and said "Let's take this outside!", the incident where an enraged Ayeka announced "I'm moving to first class!", the incident where Mihoshi's bracelet started chiming and she said "Oh my, goodness", and one after another, events unfolded no different from what you'd find in the Masaki family living room.
All the while, Katsuhito calmly read the newspaper, and when he finished, he listened to the news on headphones, and when he grew tired of that, he draped a white handkerchief over his face and fell asleep—much to the alarm of those around him.
And of course, throughout all of this, Tenchi had been soothing one person, then placating another, and hadn't slept a wink.
Now, the members of this party were as follows.
The well-known former space pirate, estimated age seven hundred and seventeen, able to pass through walls and teleport at will: Ryoko.
The first princess of the illustrious Jurai royal family, Princess Ayeka, and her younger sister, the second princess, Princess Sasami.
Their stated ages were twenty for the elder and nine for the younger.

The ace detective duo of the Galaxy Police: First Class Detective Kiyone Makibi and First Class Detective Mihoshi Kuramitsu.
Abbreviated to Mihokiyo.
Currently not present for reasons of her own: the greatest scientific genius in the universe, Washu.
Also not present for reasons of her own: Ryo-Ohki, who had lately been serving as Sasami's hat.
(These are the Masaki family's female contingent from outer space, but regarding trivial matters such as passport forgery, the author knows absolutely nothing. For readers who think Washu-chan must have taken care of all that, I'll leave it to your imagination.)
Now, the male contingent consisted of the well-known Tenchi Masaki, his father Nobuyuki Masaki, and his grandfather Katsuhito Masaki—three men in all, which meant, when you thought about it, that the Masaki household had simply relocated wholesale to Hawaii.
Guarding the home back in Okayama were Azaka and Kamidake—who had by now become completely fixed like gateposts—as well as the robot George, and there were no particular problems there. (Of course, had they come along, it would have caused considerable trouble.)

"So, where's Waikiki Beach? Instead of hanging around here, let's get going and swim already!"
Ryoko casually shrugged off her windbreaker and yanked her wrap skirt from her waist, transforming in an instant into a bikini. She had been wearing it underneath, just like a child heading to a pool.
"W-wait a moment!"
Tenchi hurriedly grabbed the windbreaker and threw it over Ryoko.
"Hold on, Ryoko. We're still inside the airport. The beach is far away from here. We go to the hotel first, unpack, and then we go!"
"What a pain. Then I'll just teleport there from here…"
"Absolutely not!"
Sasami grabbed Ryoko's arm.
"Look, everyone's watching. You have to put your skirt back on properly."
"What an astounding person."
Princess Ayeka, who normally did not show her legs even in a tropical paradise, was dressed in a young-lady style—a one-piece that reached her ankles and a crocheted cardigan.
For the record, Sasami was wearing a T-shirt and leggings in typical elementary-school-girl fashion, Mihoshi wore a cropped T-shirt and bootcut jeans in

the trendy style, and Kiyone wore a J.Crew polo shirt and jeans—one step away from looking like a college student.
Tenchi watched the women fussing around Ryoko and sighed quietly to himself, dreading what lay ahead.
"Maybe it was a mistake after all… maybe we should have just gone to the local beach instead… but then again, it wasn't my idea."
The cause of Tenchi's muttering went back to June.
It had all started when Mihoshi went to some sort of sale at the nearby shopping street—that was the beginning of the mistake.
Mihoshi, who had successfully won a lucky draw for an all-expenses-paid trip for two to Hawaii for six days, had happily phoned the Masaki household, and before anyone knew it, the idea had snowballed into "Since we're going anyway, let's all go to Hawaii together!"
What followed was like a storm: while Tenchi was out in the field, brochures were being passed around, guidebooks were being marked with highlighters, shopping lists were being drawn up, and travel goods were being purchased—and so the days passed, and Tenchi was reminded once again of the power that women could wield.
"Oh, come on, it's fine, Tenchi."
Nobuyuki patted Tenchi on the shoulder with a smile.
"I already got a great shot. Ryoko's quite the performer."
His father had a video camera firmly in hand, and Tenchi felt dizzy.
He never missed a chance.
That was the kind of man his father was.
If Tenchi had agreed, he'd no doubt have had him holding a reflector.
"… Father. Did you even stop for a moment to think about where we are and what we're doing right now?"
"Hm? All that's left is to get to the hotel and drink a cold beer by the pool, isn't it?"
Just as I thought…
Tenchi murmured.
"I wish I'd been born more like you, Dad."
Meanwhile, Katsuhito, who had been looking at the palm trees with deep emotion, turned around.
"Looks like the shuttle bus has arrived."
And so Tenchi and the party took their first steps in the eternal summer paradise.

Chapter Two:

"Wow… the ocean!"

"Wow… the ocean!"
Sasami narrowed her eyes against the brightness.
A white sandy beach sandwiched between a blue sky and a blue sea, palm trees casting small shadows in the strong sunlight, and Diamond Head beyond the rows of hotels.
This was Hawaii—the Hawaiian scenery etched into the depths of every Japanese person's memory, more Hawaii than anywhere else could possibly be, was spread out before them.
"Sasami-chan, do you like it?"
"Yes!"
A smile as dazzling as the sun.
"Tenchi-nii-chan, let's go! Hurry!"
Without waiting for a reply, Sasami darted off, and Tenchi found himself smiling involuntarily.
"She really is still a child, isn't she."
Yes—alien or second princess of the Juraian royal family, she was still a child.
And when a child sees the ocean right in front of them, everything else is instantly swept clean out of their mind.
All right, I'm going to have fun too!
Tenchi thought abruptly.
After all, this was a tropical paradise. A heaven reached after much hardship.
Having come all this way, it would be the same as being in Okayama if he spent his time worrying about everything.
"Sasami-chan—"
Tenchi waved broadly and broke into a run.
Just then.
"Ooh, the ocean. So this is the most famous ocean on Earth."
"Ryoko-san, what on earth is that scandalous swimsuit!"

Out came Ryoko in a startling deep-crimson bikini, and Ayeka in a pure-white swimsuit.
Ryoko's bikini had far too little fabric—a high-cut affair—while Ayeka wore a modest one-piece type with a long pareo tied around her waist.
"Just walking barefoot like this is enough to make my face turn red from embarrassment."
"Hey hey, you two happy people—"
Mihoshi came running over in a watermelon-patterned swimsuit.
"Now now, be careful not to trip again."
"Again" implied she had already tripped once.
"I'm fine. I'm an adult now, after all."
But the moment Mihoshi laid eyes on the ocean blue, she let out a cheer and ran off.
"Honestly… Mihoshi."
Kiyone, in a smart monochrome optical print swimsuit, began walking with the composed air befitting a swimsuit—but only for three steps.
"Wait for me!"
The next moment, Kiyone too sprinted full speed toward the ocean.
Before long, cheers and laughter and splashing mixed together and burst across Waikiki Beach.
Ryoko was laughing.
Ayeka was laughing.
Sasami, Mihoshi, Kiyone. And Tenchi too.
Ah, what a perfect summer.
To think that just seven hours away from Japan, life could feel this brilliant.
Tenchi felt laughter welling up inside him like a child's and felt slightly embarrassed at himself, and plunged his head into the oncoming waves.
A gentle impact struck his closed eyelids and passed over him.
The vast Pacific waves. The round horizon gleaming beyond.
"Phew."
When he lifted his face, Tenchi had forgotten entirely about the in-flight trouble, the carrot field, Washu being left behind at home, and even Ryo-Ohki.

"By now they're all probably frolicking on Waikiki Beach."
"Myan?"
Washu stopped in front of the culture tanks holding her experimental sample organisms and muttered to herself.
At her feet, Ryo-Ohki looked up at Washu in a bewildered way.
"You can get up on my head if you like. You must miss Sasami-chan, mustn't you?"
No reply was itself a reply.

"Well, I won't force you."
She quickly checked the status and began walking again.
"Taking a primitive means of transportation was an option. But seven hours is really quite long. When you think about how Ryo-chan only needs to switch modes and you'd be there in an instant…"
Ryo-Ohki began walking quietly along behind Washu.
"Did you want to go with Sasami-chan?"
Ryo-Ohki stopped.
Her eyes glistened moistly.
"Myamyamyamyaaaan!"
This time, the glistening eyes said everything.
"There, there, I know. But you wouldn't want to be hand luggage, would you?"
Washu looked down with amusement in her eyes, then suddenly scooped up Ryo-Ohki.
"Ahh, this feels wonderful!"
She nuzzled enthusiastically into the fur.
"This is what I wanted to do. But you're always playing hat for Sasami-chan."
"Myamya!?"
Ryo-Ohki's eyes went wide in surprise, but she quickly closed them and rubbed her head against Washu's hand.
"You're so adorable in biological mode, Ryo-chan. Your consciousness level is so high, but what you do is pure cat. Far cuter than Ryoko."
Washu went on cheerfully checking the culture tanks with Ryo-Ohki in her arms, while Ryo-Ohki dreamily imagined a southern island.
Soon.
They'd take her soon.
Open the door to summer and there's paradise.
But do they have carrots in paradise…?
"I'm sure they do."
Washu smiled.
"There'll be lots of things even tastier than carrots. Ryo-chan, let me just tweak your taste receptors a little to give you a gourmet palate…"
"Myamya!"
Ryo-Ohki shook her head vigorously.
"Oh, I see. Really, everyone is so uncooperative… why is that?"
Washu, the greatest scientific genius in the universe but lately with nothing worthy of her intellect to do, opened the door leading to the laboratory.
"Oh, Master."
George—Washu's secretary, assistant, and the Masaki household's cook—rose from in front of the monitor and yielded his place to Washu.

"Thank you, that's enough for now."
She said this without sitting down in front of the monitor, instead stretching out on the couch.
"Don't you want a vacation too?"
"Not at all."
Since I'm a robot… he stopped himself from saying and instead approached discreetly.
"… Is something the matter?"
"I'm not thinking about anything in particular. You're such a worrier."
George inwardly breathed a sigh of relief.
He had thought he might suddenly be fired.
"Ah, how dull. I wonder if something thrilling might happen."
George noticed something unsettling in Washu's expression, and his anxiety circuit activated again.
After all, this was a person who had once tried to become the mastermind behind world domination.
It wouldn't be strange if she were plotting something outrageous while the Masaki household was away.
"Master…?"
"I'm joking, joking."
Washu laughed and waved her hand.
"This isn't a stress test for your circuits, so you don't need to react so sensitively… all right then, Ryo-chan, shall we go?"
"Mya!?"
Ryo-Ohki, suddenly addressed, gave a startled jump.
"George, what I said about the vacation is genuine. For once, take it easy without a care in the world. Until we're back, the Masaki house is yours."
"So I just need to house-sit?"
The anxiety circuit hadn't fully disengaged, but the readings had dropped to ignorable levels.
"Oh, come now. You're so serious."
Washu rose from the couch, stood up straight, and composed herself with dignity.
"Now listen. Please make sure to collect the newspaper every morning. And don't forget to water the potted plants. Put Tenchi-sama's mail in his room, and his father's in the study. Close the storm shutters and check the locks properly at night. Air out the futons and let in some air during breaks in the rainy season. Make sure the garden doesn't go to ruin, and… now, let me think… the grout on the bathroom tiles was looking a bit discolored too. Please take care of other things you notice as you go along. And also…"
Seeing George freeze up, Washu suddenly cut off her words.

She burst out laughing.
"Is that what you wanted to hear? You had the look of someone expecting exactly that. You're not a household servant of the Masaki family—you don't have to fuss about things so much. If you keep using your nerves like this, you'll get frown lines. Frown lines on a robot would be no laughing matter. You really do have a most unusual personality."
"I don't believe Ayeka-hime would say such things."
George finally got a word in.
"Hm? I never said a word about Lady Ayeka. That's a bit cruel to her, isn't it?"
"……"
George conceded defeat, and Washu, satisfied, turned back to the monitor in high spirits.
"Now then. I still haven't finished setting up the subspace corridor."
"Myan!"
Ryo-Ohki immediately flew over and peered in.
…Is the Master bored?
George asked himself.
Yes, she must be bored nearly to death.
In this backwater corner of this backwater planet, with no proper use for her original intellect and abilities—she must be lamenting that.
Fortunately for the Masaki family.
"Have a pleasant journey. I believe it would do you good to rest your mind a little as well."
"Oh, you really said that?"
Washu turned around.
"Then I'll come back a wonderfully rejuvenated Washu-chan. And while I'm at it, I might just win Tenchi-dono over."
She clearly had no intention of resting her mind.
"I would recommend group dating."
George responded in relief.
Whatever was going to happen, it wouldn't happen here.
At least here in Okayama, at the Masaki house—that was safe.
George, who since meeting Washu and coming to Earth had grown to deeply love Japan's four seasons, was fond of this house surrounded by gentle nature.
He had secretly wished that he might work here, indefinitely.
"Don't worry. I intend to stay here until I've seen everything through."
Washu's fathomless green eyes smiled with amusement.
"The Prince of Light is still just a child. One day will come when this small blue planet becomes nothing but a memory… and on that day, the happy days will surely make

those memories shine. Like precious jewels in a jewelry box. That is why I stay here. I want to protect them. So that the children can spend their time in happiness…"
Washu's dreamy gaze drifted, and she cut off her words softly.
"So you need not worry about unemployment for quite some time. If you have any complaints about your treatment, we can discuss it. And with that, I'll be on my way soon. I'll leave things to you."
The face of Washu rising from in front of the monitor had already returned to that of the mad, one-of-a-kind genius scientist.
"I am most grateful for your kind words. Please leave everything to me."
George bowed deeply.

Chapter Three:

Now, here is a question.

Now, here is a question.
Can our heroine (one of them)—the princess of the illustrious Juraian royal family—swim?
"Kyah!"
Ayeka was thrown off balance by a wave and let out a small cry.
The hand she reflexively reached out was instantly grabbed by Tenchi.
"Are you all right?"
"Yes… yes."
Her cheeks flushed pink.
"It's been so many years since I've swam… I haven't had many occasions to since childhood." Ayeka answered absentmindedly.
Her awareness was more focused on the hand being held than on her own reply.
"So you can swim, then?"
"I believe so."
Ayeka shifted her gaze from the hand being held to Tenchi himself, and turned even redder.
Tenchi-sama looks surprisingly sturdy, when you look at him this way.
Having lived under the same roof, she must have seen the upper half of Tenchi's body many times—yet Ayeka was so overcome with embarrassment that she felt the urge to run all the way to the other side of the horizon.
"Um…"
"Oh, sorry."
Normally, Ayeka's bashfulness would be contagious and things would get awkward—but today's Tenchi simply let go of her hand and let his body drift with the Pacific waves.
"I haven't swum in the ocean in ages either. When I was little, I used to get taken often."
When he smiled, his white teeth gleamed like a toothpaste commercial.
"Shall we swim together?"

"Hm?"
Her heart leaped.
He invited me? He really invited me?
"I'm so happy…"
She was nearly breathless from happiness.
Ayeka smiled dreamily and, forgetting for a moment that she was in the water, reached out her hand.
She quickly stroked the water and assumed a swimming position.
"How far can you go?"
Tenchi swam out ahead.
With his powerful strokes, he pulled away in an instant.
"Tenchi-sama, wait!"
Ayeka hurried after him.
Ah, midsummer sun…
To be dyed through and through, body and soul, by this blue planet's sea and sky.
Ayeka, I'll follow you anywhere.
If Tenchi-sama is with me, I'll go to the ends of the world…
Ayeka murmured the sort of lines that couldn't be said aloud and began swimming with graceful form.
Yes—she could swim well enough not to embarrass the dignity of a princess.
In the sense that she could handle most things to a reasonable degree, one could say she was athletically gifted.
As demonstrated in her battle with Kagato, her combat ability was also high.
She simply took care never to let herself do anything that might undermine a princess's dignity.
"Is it all right to be this happy?"
Feeling a slight unease that the obstacle of Ryoko was nowhere to be seen, Ayeka deliberately shut out that unease.
It's fine! I don't care a bit about Ryoko.
Because I… have finally gotten to be alone with Tenchi-sama!
Ah, I feel like I could do anything.
Tomorrow and the day after, as long as we're on this island, there are endless opportunities.

"……"
Ryoko herself was far out to sea, floating on her back, with her mind empty, staring at the sky.
For Ryoko, who had always disliked cluttered, complicated places, this was quite comfortable.

As far as the eye could see, there was nothing but water and sky.
"So Earth even has places like this."
Ryoko closed her eyes contentedly.
Maybe I should bring Tenchi here.
He probably can't swim out this far, so I'll just teleport a little…
Behind her eyelids, Tenchi smiled gently.
Ryoko, I like you… he seemed to be saying.
I wanted to be alone with just you.
You understand, don't you? How I feel?
"Yeah yeah, I know."
Since no one was watching, Ryoko allowed herself a broad grin.
Right, that's more like it.
Since we managed to escape from Okayama, we should do things we normally can't…

"Hey, where's Tenchi-nii-chan?"
Sasami suddenly snapped back to herself and looked around the beach.
"Sis and Ryoko-nee-chan aren't here either."
"Hm? Aren't they around here somewhere?"
Mihoshi also looked up and glanced around.
"Oh, there!"
A pleasantly tired-looking Tenchi and Ayeka could be seen coming out of the water with blissfully happy expressions.
"Tenchi-nii-chan!"
Sasami ran over.
"Hey hey, hurry up. Sasami learned how to swim! Just now I swam to where I couldn't touch the bottom. Mihokiyo-nee-chans taught me. Sis, come on, hurry!"
"All right, all right, just a moment."
As Ayeka dashed forward, she felt as though she stepped on something hard.
"?"
She hurriedly looked at her feet, and there was the tanned hand of a man.
"Oh, I do beg your pardon."
She bowed her head, her face red.
The man in a garish aloha shirt flinched and pulled his hand back, then stared hard at Ayeka's face.

Dark hair and a tanned face… the deeply carved features were not those of a Japanese person that Ayeka was accustomed to seeing.
"You… can you see me?"
"Pardon?"

"Hey, Batu, what's wrong?"
A blonde woman on the opposite side turned around.
"Um… what does this mean?"
Had she done something terribly wrong?
Her heart naturally began to race.
"Ayeka-san, hurry up."
Tenchi, who had walked ahead with Sasami, turned back.
"Oh, yes…"
"My, what a cute boy."
The blonde woman immediately forgot all about Ayeka and sent a dreamy look toward Tenchi, who was approaching.
"Stop it, Pamela!"
The man called Batu restrained the woman with an ominous voice, and stood up with a strangely swift motion.
Ayeka blinked.
For a moment, the man's form seemed to flicker.
"You can see, can you? Can you also see this one?"
He jerked his chin toward the blonde woman.
"… Yes."
Despite being under the unobstructed midday sun, Ayeka felt a chill that she couldn't put into words.
"Well, how about that."
The man gave a low whistle, then grinned.
"Miss, for you of all people to have stepped on Batu's hand—I'm honored. I suppose you and I were destined to meet."
"I must… be going now."
Ayeka instinctively backed away and, as if chased by the man's gaze, began to walk off.
"What's wrong? You looked like you were talking to someone."
Tenchi looked at her curiously.
Ayeka was startled and stared back at Tenchi's face.
"Tenchi-sama, don't tell me…"
No, it's nothing.
She murmured inwardly as she quickened her pace.
It's nothing. It's absolutely nothing.
There's no way anything could happen in such bright sunlight.
"I left you behind, so she might be angry… but probably not."
As if a little embarrassed, Tenchi walked slightly apart from her.
In hindsight, that was the moment he should have noticed.

That everyone was just slightly, imperceptibly off—charmed by the magic of the southern island.
The sun, brimming with healing power, and the sea breeze.
The languorous flow of time that seemed to anesthetize the deepest parts of the mind.
Walking in the shade of trees, the deep green, the sweet scent of flowers, the foreign tongue, the smell of life woven into the body—all of it wipes away what daily life has etched into one.
That's why people can be so much bolder than usual here.
Like changing out of everyday clothes into a brightly colored swimsuit…
(When I look at Ayeka-san this way, she's really beautiful. Why didn't I notice when she was at home?)
Tenchi realized he had been staring at the area of Ayeka's chest, modestly covered by her pure-white swimsuit.
It wasn't polite. But still…
It's fine. I just couldn't help looking because she's beautiful.
Tenchi affirmed it with unusual force.
Having moved ourselves to a midsummer island seven hours away from home, time to say goodbye to my usual not-quite-sharp self.
Just now, when I boldly asked her, Ayeka-san looked really happy, and everyone's in swimsuits.
Tenchi pictured the red-and-white swimsuit pair of Ryoko and Ayeka—like two colors in a music festival.
My own preference is white, if I'm honest. But Sasami-chan's school-style swimsuit was cute too. Mihoshi-san looked great in the watermelon print… or is it just that everyone looks cute in a place like this?
Tenchi, who was fairly oblivious despite straying quite far from his usual modest self fighting it out in the carrot field, didn't notice the shadow creeping up behind him either.
"Tenchiiii."
"Whoa!"
He was suddenly caught in an armlock from behind.
"You were walking on the beach with Ayeka and thinking about what exactly? Looking so pleased with yourself. What's so interesting about walking with a flat-chested woman like that? Come swim with me."
"I just came back from swimming."
Tenchi finally wrestled free of Ryoko's arm.
"Let me rest a bit first, then I'll go."
Oh great, here we go again.

It's no different from usual after all.
Steeling himself for the angry cry of "Tenchi-sama!", Tenchi turned back to look at Ayeka.
"Hm?"
Ayeka was standing stock still with her back to them, staring blankly into the distance.
"What's with her?"
Ryoko peered suspiciously at Ayeka's back.
"That's not possible… it can't be…"
What Ayeka had seen was the couple in question beginning to walk away while arguing—and then vanishing into thin air.
"Something smells fishy."
Ryoko hadn't witnessed the moment, but her instincts were working, and she muttered.
"Hey, Ayeka. Don't go poking your nose into trouble. I'm here for a vacation."
Ayeka didn't respond.
Was I tired, she wondered?
Or was it a mistake?
"Oi, Ayeka, wake up!"
"Y-yes."
In that instant, reality returned along with the strong sunlight.
"What do you mean?!"
"You're too slow."
Ryoko grinned.
"Oh well, I suppose that's fine. Starting off with a fight right off the bat isn't ideal either. Hey, Tenchi. Let's go swimming."
"I shall come too!"
Just as the golden triangle was restored.
"As you are, as you are."
Appearing from nowhere with an 8mm video camera was Nobuyuki.
"Ah, Hawaii really is something. I'm going to be so busy."
Nobuyuki, dressed in an aloha shirt and shorts, grinned and followed the bewildered three.
"Can't do this kind of thing at home. Sasami-chan was just so adorable. Come on, no need to be stiff—be more natural…"
"Oh, uncle, really."
The blushing Ayeka retreated into the sea, so Tenchi had no choice but to follow.
"Oh! Wait!"
Ryoko immediately chased after them.

"Yes, yes, I do love harmony in a swimsuit."
Nobuyuki muttered something incomprehensible and followed the three as they ran.
"That's wrong, Nobuyuki. Harmony is the beginning of hardship."
Katsuhito, who had been relaxing at an open-air café with his beer, finished the sentence for him. But his eyes were smiling warmly.
"Tenchi will be rewarded for all his usual hard work by this."
"Did you say something, father-in-law?"
Nobuyuki turned around with his 8mm.
"Care to join me?"
"That sounds wonderful."
Katsuhito, raising his can of Budweiser, wearing his aloha shirt masterfully, looked not at all like a Shinto priest—but seen through the camera, he made for a surprisingly good picture.
"Ahh, the depths of it…"
Nobuyuki found himself genuinely impressed, and decided to rest his tired eyes together with his beer.

Chapter Four:

Now, this is what happened that night.

Now, this is what happened that night.
While the others got excited over the guidebook arguing about where to go tomorrow and where to go the day after, Ayeka was feeling unwell for some reason.
Her head felt heavy, and even moving her body felt like a bother.
"Hey, Sis, can we go to the ocean again tomorrow?"
Sasami, who looked as if she still couldn't get enough even after spending the entire day in the sea, turned around.
"Only if you're with someone."
Ayeka answered listlessly.
"I don't think I'll swim tomorrow. I think I'll stay quiet."
"Why?"
Sasami looked back at her in surprise.
"The ocean is wonderful. I was going to show you how I can swim now."
"My head hurts a little…"
Ayeka pressed her temple and closed her eyes.
"A cold, is it?"
Ryoko took notice.
"I heard they say that a certain type of person doesn't catch colds."[1]
"Members of the royal family do not catch colds."
Ayeka raised her face sharply.
"I am simply tired from an unfamiliar journey in cramped seats. I am of a more delicate constitution than someone as reckless as you. I was outdoors under strong sunlight all day, wasn't I? The UV rays on Earth may not agree with me."
"You've never keeled over from UV rays before."Ryoko smirked.
"I suppose a little charm wouldn't hurt—like occasionally catching a cold."

[1] Idiots

"I keep telling you, it's not a cold."
Contrary to her words, Ayeka truly did look weary.
"The one who never gets colds is you, isn't it? If there were an illness that could lay you low, the people of Earth would surely all be dead by now."
"I never said it went that far." Ryoko replied with a sulk.
"Here I am worrying about you, and this princess just… well, whatever. But don't pass it on to me."
"For the last time, it's not a cold."
"Sis, are you okay?"
Sasami peered at her with concern.
"Your color doesn't look great. You should rest."
"Thank you, Sasami."
Ayeka stood with relief.
"Don't worry. I'll surely be better tomorrow."
Watching Ayeka take to her bed, Mihoshi and Kiyone, who had witnessed the whole thing, exchanged a glance.
"Is it a cold?"
"I have cold medicine issued by the Galaxy Police, if that works."
"I'm fine."
A muffled reply came back through the blanket.
"Thank you for your kindness… I'm sorry."
At the time, no one imagined this would become anything so serious.
Even Ayeka herself believed it was due to fatigue.

Past midnight, Ayeka thought she heard someone sobbing in her dream.
The voice, high and low, clung to Ayeka's ears, beat against the glass window, and grudgingly faded away.
(Who…?)
She tried to get up, but her body wouldn't move.
There was no reply from the source of the sobbing.
(Who? Who is it?!) Ayeka desperately called out.
Her body was heavy as if sunk to the bottom of water, and no matter how much she tried to raise her arm with all her strength, she could not.
(Sleep paralysis? Someone—Sasami!)
At that moment, her body suddenly felt light.
Ayeka gasped and sat up, looking around the darkened room.
In the next bed, Sasami was sleeping with her blanket half kicked off.
The sound of sobbing was coming from near the window.
"…It was just the wind."

As Ayeka watched Sasami's content sleeping face, her anxiety dissolved into relief and disappeared.
Ayeka slipped softly out of her bed and walked toward the window.
There was nothing to fear if it was just the wind.
Her head still felt heavy and her feet felt as if she were treading on clouds, but Ayeka placed her hand on the windowframe to check whether the window was open.
Then, beyond the lanai (balcony) through the pane of glass, a vague shadow materialized.
(Is someone there?!)
Ayeka looked up with a start and froze.
Outside the window, a man was floating.
A man casting shadows on his dark-complexioned face, both eyes glittering fiercely.
Ayeka felt the blood drain from her face as she inhaled sharply.
It was the man from the daytime.
Unmistakably, the man who had vanished from Waikiki Beach in the daytime.
On the thirty-third floor, outside the window, there was no space where a human being could possibly stand.
"Hey there, miss."
It was a low, ominous-sounding voice.
The man spread his arms, passed through the lanai railing, and stood before Ayeka.
"Remember me? I came because you're so beautiful."
The man smiled, showing white teeth.
His features were deeply carved, well-formed—one could even call him handsome.
He wasn't particularly tall.
Just slightly taller than Ayeka.
"It seems the words can't come out from happiness."
The man's lips twisted and an evil aura shimmered.
Suddenly the man's right arm passed through the window glass and grabbed Ayeka's arm.
"Kyaaaaa—"
Not knowing from where inside herself such a voice had emerged, Ayeka cried out.
"Sis?!"
"No, no, no—let go!!"
"Sis, what's wrong?"
She suddenly realized it was Sasami who was gripping her arm and shaking her.
"S-Sasami…?!"
"Sis?"
"A man was… outside the window…"
"Outside the window?"

The man was gone.
"There's no one there. Maybe you had a dream?"
A dream? No. That man definitely grabbed my hand through the glass…
Ayeka quickly looked at her wrist.
There were clear marks from fingers on it.
"Sasami, look…"
Ayeka staggered and put her hand on Sasami's shoulder.
She felt sick.
The core of her head felt numb, and even her vision seemed to be swaying.
(I want you.)
Suddenly the man's voice invaded her mind.
(You saw my form. You heard my voice. You made contact with me. Destiny has called to you.)
"Stop! Get out! Get out of my head!!"
Ayeka pressed her head and tried to drown out the man's voice.
(Cold of you. I'm not saying I'll do anything to you right now. Let's take our time and get to know each other.)
"Sis, what's wrong?! Sis!"
"Help me, Sasami… call Tenchi-sama…"
Sasami's figure receded.
Ayeka lost consciousness and crumpled to the floor.

Chapter Five:

(Ten… bro… open… up!)

(Ten… bro… open… up!)
Someone was knocking on a door.
No, not a door—a wall.
Strange… right now I'm at Pamela's villa, having a cocktail.
Blonde Pamela.
Sexy Pamela in a blood-red strapless dress with her white shoulders bare.
I know this woman well.
Things like where the mole is on the back hidden by the dress, that her stockings are seamed and she wears no underwear, that she's into aromatherapy, that she's devoted to the mega-vitamin theory, yet can't quit smoking and takes it out on other people—those sorts of trivial habits and quirks.
(Open… hurry…)
It really doesn't make sense.
Is there a mouse in the wall?
"Pamela."
Pamela turned around from the home bar counter.
"There's a sound. Someone's knocking on the wall."
"It's the wiring work."
Pamela stepped closer, grinding her pin heels into the shaggy mat.
"Let's think of something more fun. Like, about you and me."
Pamela licked her lips and leaned over me as if to press down on me.
"How's the cocktail? Did I put a little too little liqueur?"
The cocktail was thick and sweet, with more liqueur than was needed.
"Delicious, Pamela. Anything you make is fine with me."
And then, all at once, my heart gave a violent leap as if I'd suddenly gotten drunk.
(Open up!)
The voice came through clearly, and at the same instant, my vision warped sickeningly.
"I can hear the voice! It's real!"
Pamela extended a finger and pressed it against my lips.

"Naughty. Look at me. Never mind the voice."
No… I am…
"Want me to kiss you?"
Pamela's red lips touched mine, and a hot tongue forced its way in.
A kiss as sweet as liqueur, mind-numbing.
No, I am… who is this woman?! Just where am I?!
"Tenchi-nii-chan, open up!!"
Tenchi jerked awake.
The hotel room was dark.
"Open up! Please open up…"
"Sasami-chan?!"
He ran to the door in a hurry and unlocked it.
"Tenchi-nii-chan! Sis is…"
"What happened?"
Ayeka and Sasami's room was next to Tenchi's and the others'.

_____

"Hurry!"
The moment he rushed into the next room, Ayeka was on the floor.
"Ayeka-san?!"
He helped her up and shook her two or three times, and Ayeka faintly opened her eyes.
"Tenchi-sama…"
"What happened?"
"…Tenchi-sama, help me."
She might not have fully regained consciousness yet.
Tenchi struggled to lift the limp Ayeka and lay her on the bed.
He placed his hand on her forehead to check her temperature.
No fever… if anything, she felt cold.
That said, Tenchi knew almost nothing about people from Jurai.
He was only measuring by Earth people's standards.
"Sasami-chan, can you go get Grandpa?"
"Okay."
Sasami nodded with a serious face and left the room, but came back almost immediately.
"He's not here. Only Uncle Nobuyuki is asleep."
"Hm?"
Tenchi involuntarily looked at the clock.
It was past one in the morning.
Maybe he went for a walk because he couldn't sleep.

I couldn't get to sleep until the middle of the night either, and Grandpa was still up after I got into bed.
Which means… I've only slept about an hour.
"Should I wake up uncle?"
"No…"
Waking him wouldn't accomplish much—he'd only panic.
Father's a plain old Earth person anyway, and for now Ayeka-san seems to be sleeping, so…
Tenchi furrowed his brow as he looked at Ayeka's pale face.
But still—just what happened to Ayeka-san?
Did she have a bad dream because she was tired…?
"Hey, Sasami-chan, I'll keep watch, so…"
Just as he began to speak, the side of a woman's pale face flashed through his mind.
The woman opened her red lips and seemed to be whispering something.
"Ugh…"
Feeling a sudden wave of dizziness, Tenchi involuntarily shook his head.
Who was that?
He had a feeling he'd seen her somewhere before…
"Tenchi-nii-chan, are you all right?"
The vision disappeared.
"I'm fine. Sasami-chan, you can sleep. I'll keep watch over Ayeka-san."
"But…"
Sasami's face clouded.
Just then.
"My, my, what on earth happened here?"
The closet door opened and an unexpected person appeared.
"Washu-san?!"
"Mya!"
Ryo-Ohki was with her too.
"Ryo-chan!"
Ryo-Ohki immediately flew over to Sasami and settled into her arms.
"Thank goodness Washu-chan came. Um, Sis collapsed. She was screaming terribly in the night, and when I woke up to see what was happening…"
"Yes, yes, let me have a look."
Washu cut off Sasami's machine-gun chatter and went to Ayeka's side.
She placed her hand on her forehead and carefully checked her pulse.
"Mild shock symptoms. She's sleeping now, so I think she's all right. But more importantly—what happened here?"
"Hm?"

Washu beckoned Tenchi over and pointed to Ayeka's wrist.
He hadn't noticed it before, but there was a red mark.
As if… someone had squeezed hard.
"Finger marks…?"
Did she get into a fight with Ryoko?
"Sis saw it too. She said someone was standing outside the window and grabbed her."
"That can't be."
Tenchi felt a chill run down his spine.
This is strange.
I just had that weird dream…
Weird dream!?
Another flashback struck him.
The image of a blonde woman with bare white shoulders.
The thick, sweet taste of a cocktail.
"Pamela!"
The words escaped before he thought.
"Hm? What's the matter? Did you say something?"
The vision instantly faded.
"Washu-san, am I tired too?"
Tenchi shook his head to drive away the vision, and noticed Sasami watching him with frightened eyes, and forced a smile.
"Hmm… it seems something is going on. Tenchi-dono, sorry to impose, but would you keep an eye on Ayeka-san? I have a feeling I might need the spirit-wave detector. I have the parts back in the lab."
"Washu-san, where are you going?"
"The spirit-wave detector… so, a ghost?!"
"No way—!"
Sasami squeezed Ryo-Ohki tight.
"Is there a ghost? Does something haunt this place? Sasami is scared…"
"And yet Ryoko isn't reacting to anything. Well, never mind. I'll be back as soon as I can."
Washu disappeared into the subspace corridor that had opened in the closet.
"T-Tenchi-nii-chan!"
"…Should I call Ryoko?"
"No! Don't go."
He was caught between a rock and a hard place.
"It's okay, Sasami-chan. I'll be right here."

A ghost hunt, right off the bat… now that I think of it, hotels are always supposed to come with this kind of story. But if it's just this room, there's also the option of asking to change rooms.
"Let's sleep, Sasami-chan. You won't be able to play tomorrow."
Tenchi resigned himself.
"O-okay…"
"Don't worry. I'm not scared of anything like that."
"Okay…"
"Ryo-Ohki is here too, right? When Grandpa gets back, I'll have him come over."
"Okay."
Sasami still had a frightened look on her face, but she obediently climbed into bed and pulled the blanket up to her neck.
"Phew…"
Tenchi sighed and looked at Ayeka's face.
It's okay, she's sleeping…
Ayeka-san is so sensitive.
Setting aside the ghost thing, maybe it wasn't good for her to be alone in the room with just Sasami-chan. Maybe I should ask to swap rooms with Ryoko and the others.
Tenchi continued to watch over Ayeka's sleeping face, turning things over in his mind.
About thirty minutes must have passed.
Reassured, Sasami had long since fallen asleep.
Tenchi began to feel his eyelids growing heavy.
I can't.
I promised Washu-san I'd keep a proper watch…
He stood up and tried rubbing his cheeks and pressing on his eyelids, but he was still sleepy.
Washu hadn't returned.
Oh well, just a little… Tenchi finally gave up, returned to Ayeka's bedside, knelt down, and rested his head there.
(If something happens, I'll properly wake up…)
Within five seconds of making that resolution, Tenchi had plunged into sleep as if falling into a chasm.
A familiar scene appeared again.
The elegant living room of a villa… a pleasant breeze blowing in through the open window, swaying the lace curtains.
Me sitting on a rattan sofa enjoying a cocktail, and the blonde woman glancing back over her bare white shoulders from the home bar.
…Pamela!
"What is it?"

Those red lips smiled at him.
"Do you want me, boy?"
Something was wrong.
Did I really know a beauty like this?
For a moment, a clear consciousness broke through Tenchi's white, cocktail-clouded mind.
"Who are you? Where is this place?"
In that instant, Pamela's expression changed.
Ice-blue eyes that seemed to freeze over, a mouth twisted as if suppressing anger.
Pamela murmured several words in a tone that made one's blood run cold, and turned her back.
He couldn't understand the words.
He hadn't caught them.
And then, the world suddenly vanished.
"What's wrong, Tenchi?"
"Uh… Grandpa!?"
It took two or three seconds to understand he had been shaken awake by Katsuhito.
"How long was I asleep?"
He realized as he asked that it was a pointless question.
"The traces of disturbed energy linger."
Katsuhito furrowed his brow and cast his gaze searching through the air.
"Something must have happened while I was away."
"Where did you go?"
Tenchi stole a glance at the clock.
2:15… that meant he had slept for nearly thirty minutes.
Tenchi was ashamed.
If he hadn't noticed Katsuhito come in, it meant he also wouldn't have noticed if Ayeka-san had called out.
"Just a walk."
Katsuhito gave the expected answer.
"To make sure Ryoko doesn't frighten the good folk of Hawaii— I walked her on a leash, so to speak. Even in a foreign land, I don't think it's fitting to be flying around like a bat on a bright moonlit night like this."
Oh dear, Ryoko too.
Tenchi sighed.
He'd suspected she wouldn't be sleeping quietly, and so that's what it was.
"Hey, Tenchi!"
An energetic face peeked through the door.
"You guys, all huddled up in there—what are you doing? Not sleeping?"

"You're not sleeping either, Ryoko."
Tenchi replied wearily.
It didn't seem like there'd be any more sleep tonight.
I'm the only one who can explain the situation to everyone, and…

So it was.
By the time Washu returned at dawn, Tenchi had strangely become wide awake and unable to sleep.
Ayeka was—perhaps deeply tired—still not waking at all.
"Tenchi-dono, good work. …Aren't you sleepy?"
"I was, but…"
He couldn't quite bring himself to say I'm anxious too.
The morning light crept into the profile of Washu assembling her egg-shaped spirit-wave detector, and also added light to the guileless sleeping face of Ryoko, who was slumped on the sofa.
It was hard to tell whether Grandpa was meditating or sleeping.
The Hawaii dawn was a spectacle worthy of this earthly paradise.
A scene like a Ken Done illustration, blending oranges, light blues, and blues.
Together with the magnificent sunrise, the anxious dreams of the night faded and disappeared.
Let it go… in truth, I don't even know what I saw myself.
Ah, and speaking of which—I'm hungry.
Finding himself longing for rice and miso soup after only one day away from Japan, Tenchi found it oddly funny.
Rice and miso soup must be the symbol of peace.
Unable to bear the hunger, Tenchi slowly stood up and looked in the mini refrigerator.
Macadamia nuts and Oreo cookies.
Tenchi nibbled on the macadamia nuts and thought about breakfast.
At least, as long as he was thinking about breakfast, it was peaceful.
Breakfast, lunch, and then dinner.
The space between peace and peace ought to be filled with vacation.
At night you fall flat and sleep soundly, then wake to the brilliance of abundant sunlight.
That was how it should have been.
But Tenchi felt a quiet unease putting down roots somewhere deep in his heart.
The macadamia nuts couldn't absorb that unease.

Chapter Six:

Around the time the clock struck seven,

Around the time the clock struck seven, Ayeka woke with a start and jumped upright.
"Washu-san! I thought you were staying back in Okayama…"
"Good morning, Lady Ayeka. How are you feeling?"
"Feeling?"
Ayeka looked around bewilderedly, from Tenchi looking sleepy to Ryoko letting out a great yawn.
"Nothing in particular seems wrong with me, but…"
"Sis, you woke up?"
Sasami rubbed her eyes and threw off the blanket.
"Hey hey, are you okay? Everyone was so worried about you."
"About what?"
Tenchi and Sasami involuntarily looked at each other.
"Ayeka-san, do you remember nothing at all?"
"Last night, Sis was screaming and then collapsed. You said it yourself—go get Tenchi-sama."
"I said that?"
Ayeka blinked in confusion.
"I don't remember anything at all. What happened to me?"
"Huh?!"
"This isn't ordinary."
Washu muttered and approached Ayeka's bed, then took her wrist to examine it again.
"Oh? It's gone."
Ayeka involuntarily pulled her wrist back and swung her legs off the bed to sit upright.

"Did I do something wrong? Tenchi-sama, what did I do?"
"Don't you remember? Sis, you met a ghost last night!"
"A ghost…?!"
The hapless Ayeka froze looking at Tenchi's face, and Tenchi was left speechless.
"Last night…"
As she listened to Sasami's account, Ayeka's face went pale and her gaze drifted away from Tenchi's face into the air.
"That couldn't be… such a thing…"
"Hmph. Should've stayed out instead of leaving when I did."
Ryoko, disgruntled at having missed the ghost by going out for a late-night jaunt, muttered unhappily.
"Hey, Ayeka. I'll swap rooms with you. I don't know why you can't remember, but once something shows up, it'll definitely come back. Man, getting haunted by a ghost right off the bat."
"We don't know that."
Tenchi hurriedly interrupted.
"Ayeka-san, there are no ghosts. But if you change rooms, maybe you won't have bad dreams anymore—that's probably the best idea."
"I…"
Ayeka's face clearly showed unease.
"Why can I not remember anything? After something like that happened, why…"
"Lady Ayeka, there's no need to worry. Leave it to Washu-chan."
Washu put a reassuring hand on Ayeka's shoulder and produced the egg-shaped device.
"Ta-daaah! Washu-chan's spirit-wave detector! With this, anything that comes near will be obvious at a glance. After that, I just need Ryoko to do a little work and it's all over! Don't you feel better?"
Inside the egg-shaped device was a window, and a small ghost was sleeping inside it.
"Look, when something spiritual comes near, this ghost wakes up and starts moving. It's been calibrated to change in ten stages depending on the strength of the spirit wave."
"What? Let me see! Oh no, it's so cuuute!"
The egg-shaped device passed into Sasami's hands, and Ayeka smiled slightly.
"I'll try not to think about it. I'm sorry for worrying everyone."
"Then let's go have breakfast."
Tenchi also smiled with relief.
"I'll go wake up Father."

Seeing that the hotel's breakfast buffet was stocked with everything from rice and miso soup to natto, salted salmon, and pickled plums, Tenchi was moved to murmur in genuine emotion.
"With this, everything is fine! Just knowing that I can eat rice here has solved half my problems."
"You sound like an old man."
That said, Ryoko herself was piling her bowl high with rice.
"Not having to make breakfast, how wonderful."
Sasami smiled as she brought a forkful of scrambled eggs with ketchup to her mouth.
"Sasami wants to stay in Hawaii forever."
"That does have its appeal…"
Nobuyuki, contrary to everyone's expectations, had made very American choices.
"Ayeka-san, are you going to eat all of that?"
"Hm? Yes…"
Ayeka's plate was piled high with as much food as she could take.
"I'm just so hungry…"
At a pace incomprehensible given her usual small appetite, she polished off the food, and when she went to get seconds—a third time—Ryoko stared with wide eyes.
"Ayeka, have you had some kind of change of heart?"
"What do you mean?"
"Well, whatever. If you can eat that much, no need to worry."
"I am not ill."
Ayeka had three helpings and seemed about to eat even the grapefruit rind, but at last she seemed settled and began to drink her after-breakfast coffee.
"By the way, I wonder what happened to Kiyone-san and the others?"
At that time, Kiyone and Mihoshi had gotten thoroughly lost in the vast hotel grounds, exactly as they always did.
Only Mihoshi could get lost trying to go get breakfast.
"They missed the Hawaiian breakfast."
Washu, who had finished eating long ago, said curtly and stood up.
"Then shall I go ghost-hunting? Lady Ayeka, I'd like you to act together with me today. Oh wait, first we need to move rooms."
"I'm not afraid of ghosts."
Buoyed by a satisfying breakfast, Ayeka was currently in fighting spirit.
"If you've got that much energy, you're fine."
Washu held out the spirit-wave detector to Ayeka.
The ghost in the window had woken up and was wavering between levels 1 and 2.
"Oh! The little ghost is awake!"
Sasami eagerly reached out.

"I want one too~"
"I'll make you another one. Tenchi-dono, do you want one?"
"N-no thank you."
Tenchi answered immediately.
"That means there's a ghost nearby, doesn't it? If I'm carrying something like that, I'll be too conscious of it to enjoy myself."
"Don't worry. At this level, it's normal for it to react anywhere."
Washu seemed strangely pleased.
"Places where people gather, especially hotels, are places where spiritual presences tend to gather too. Even more so if something happened there. So if you use it in a famous suicide spot…"
"T-that's quite enough."
"Until it exceeds level 5 there's nothing to worry about."
Washu put a hand on the stiff Ayeka's shoulder and smiled meaningfully.
"Rest assured that the universe's greatest genius, Washu-chan, will definitely resolve this. By the way, Ryoko—you don't sense anything?"
"Just weaklings."
Ryoko answered with a bored yawn.
"I can't be bothered dealing with small frys one by one. I only take on opponents worth fighting. Watch."
Ryoko snapped her fingers in the air as if flicking an invisible nose.
"If I tried to sense them I could, but watching them is boring. Come on, let's go have fun."Ryoko stretched and stood up.
"Ayeka's going ghost-hunting, right? Then I'll go for a swim."
The moment Ryoko grabbed Tenchi's arm, Ayeka and Sasami grabbed the other hand.
"No way!"
Sasami shouted.
"If you disappear from here, it'll cause a huge commotion, won't it?"
"Tch."
Ryoko clicked her tongue and reluctantly let go of Tenchi.
"I'll be at the beach. Deal with the room change yourselves!"
Before she'd finished speaking, Ryoko vanished.
"Ryoko!!"
Tenchi looked around startled, but fortunately no other guests were looking their way.
"What a troublesome child. Honestly, who does she take after?"
"Please do talk to her properly, Washu-san."
Just as Tenchi and the others stood to leave their seats.
"Tenchi-san~!"
Mihoshi came running with a big wave.

"We finally found you!"
"Mihoshi just kept wandering off."
Kiyone shook her head resignedly at the table.
"We missed breakfast."
"Feel free to eat. I'll be at the beach."
Tenchi smiled.
"We'll be at the beach."
"Fine, fine. I'd be in trouble if Mihoshi got lost again."
"But we came all this way~!"
Mihoshi gave a reproachful look.
"I want to eat donuts and muffins and cupcakes and ice cream."
"Oh, Sasami wants ice cream too!"
"…I'll go get them. Go back to the room with Tenchi-san and the others."
Kiyone sighed.
"What's sad about being sent on a supply run first thing in the morning…"
"Oh, and if you happen to find a modem, please get one for me."
"There won't be anything like that."
Wherever this group went in the world, things never seemed to change.
"Mihoshi! Don't go wandering off somewhere on your own. Go straight back to the room."
"Yes yes, I know."
Mihoshi's eyes lit up.
"Hey, Sasami-chan. There was an amazing shop with beautiful crystal goods—want to go look?"
"Yes, let's go!"
"Mihoshi!"
Kiyone started to protest but gave up halfway.
"I'll go too. We might as well all get lost together."
"I won't get lost this time. I've already seen every last corner of this place."
Mihoshi laughed.
Certainly, with this partner, the word boredom had no place in her life.
And being free from boredom meant life was full.
"I'll be right back."
Mihoshi went happily dashing off with Sasami in tow.
"Wait."
Kiyone hurried after them.
"Let's meet at lunch, then."
Tenchi called out after Kiyone's retreating figure.
It seemed today would be free time.

For a moment, the tempting option of sleeping through till noon came to mind, but Tenchi quickly dismissed it.
Ryoko would definitely come and beat me awake.
And Sasami-chan will want to play at the beach when she gets back.
Oh well, I'll just sleep soundly tonight.
Tenchi thought nonchalantly, not yet knowing what his fate had in store.
Fate was at that very moment secretly watching for a chance to latch on.

Chapter Seven:

Leaving the luggage for later…

Leaving the luggage for later, once Ayeka had moved into Ryoko and Mihokiyo's room, Tenchi had gone to the beach in a T-shirt and sandals to look for Ryoko.
"Oh, Tenchi! Took you long enough."
Ryoko immediately flew over and grabbed Tenchi's arm.
"Ayeka didn't come, did she. So, shall we go?"
"Go where?"
Ryoko grinned.
"Close your eyes for a sec. Come on, quick!"
He had no say in the matter.
Ryoko had a firm grip on Tenchi and covered his eyes.
"Ryoko! Hey—"
"You can open them now."
Ryoko's hands released him.
The moment he opened his eyes, a gleaming expanse of ocean spread out far below.
"Wh—!"
"Nice place, isn't it?"
Ryoko slowly descended, hovering about a meter above the water's surface.
"Ocean and sky. Nothing extra to clutter it up."
"Ryoko, you did it again! Just how far have we come?"
"Who knows."
Ryoko was laughing.
"Somewhere in the middle of the ocean, anyway."
"The middle of the ocean…"
Tenchi steeled himself and looked around.

Hawaii was supposed to have eight large and small islands, yet not a single one was visible.
They must have gone far from Oahu and the regular shipping lanes.
"Ryoko!"
Tenchi opened his mouth to give her a piece of his mind.
But the complaint that had made it all the way to his lips retreated as he looked at Ryoko's face.
Because Ryoko looked so genuinely happy.
"Hey, Tenchi… nice here, isn't it? I came out here alone yesterday. Out here, you can forget all the dull things. Come on, keep me company for a while."
"Hmm…"
As the shock subsided, he felt his heart gradually lightening.
"Don't like it? If you don't, say so. I'll take you back to the beach… I'll be disappointed, but…"
Ryoko's face clouded.
Just like a child expecting to be scolded.
Tenchi found it funny.
"It's not that I don't like it. It's a little scary."
The cloud instantly cleared to a bright smile.
"Scared? Ah, right. You're human."
Ryoko lowered him down to just above the water's surface while still holding him, and put up a spherical barrier.
"There, you can let go now."
The spherical transparent barrier began to sway gently with the waves.
"It feels like being trapped inside a soap bubble."
Tenchi looked up at the sky and squinted against the brightness.
"I've never experienced anything like this."
"I'm pretty useful, aren't I?"
"I suppose."
Tenchi decided to be slightly mean.
"If only you didn't cause trouble, I'd praise you."
"You said it!"
The barrier let out a sharp hiss and vanished.
In no time Tenchi slid into the sea, frantically moving his arms and legs.
"Ryoko!"
Finally getting his face above water.
"Ahahahaha!"
Ryoko laughed and looked down at Tenchi.
"Say that again and I'll feed you to the whales."

"Whales don't eat humans."
Tenchi shouted back while treading water.
"Come on down. It's cold and feels wonderful."
"I know. I was here all yesterday."
Ryoko laughed as she glided down toward the water's surface.
Her feet were hovering.
"Ryoko, listen—"
"What?"
Ryoko's feet touched the water's surface.
"Gotcha!!"
Tenchi grabbed hold of Ryoko's feet and dragged her into the water.
"Ahh, it's cold!"
Ryoko thrashed and kicked, shaking Tenchi's hands loose.
"I'll make you tuna bait."
"Sorry, tuna is a little further north."
"Then sharks!"
Ryoko bared her teeth and pretended to bite Tenchi.
She's really just like a kid.
"Don't bite me. My life still has a ways to go."
Tenchi burst out laughing.
Playing around like this makes you feel like you've gone back to being a child.
We used to do water play in the nearby river.
I even slipped and got swept away once, and nearly drowned.
"If we're going to end up soaking wet anyway, I should've worn my swimsuit."
Tenchi complained.
"That's your fault. You should've stayed quietly inside the barrier."
"You wanted to swim anyway, didn't you? So it doesn't matter what either of us is wearing."
"You can dry off afterwards."
Ryoko yanked off Tenchi's T-shirt, rolled it into a ball, and hurled it high into the air.
"Race you to where it lands."
The T-shirt ball disappeared, lost in the sun.
"That's terrible. You didn't fling it into satellite orbit, did you?"
"Look, it's falling!"
Ryoko rose again above the water's surface, squinting up at the sky.
"Ryoko, go get it. I'm already tired."
"What a pain."
Without warning, Ryoko teleported behind him.

Before he had time to think, Tenchi was being held in Ryoko's arms and soaring straight over the waves.
"Here!"
Ryoko caught the T-shirt in one hand.
"Shall we go see the volcano? Clothes dry quickly enough."
"Not somewhere with lots of people."
"Somewhere tourists don't go."
She said it and their vision blurred.
Ryoko and Tenchi were hovering directly above the crater at Kilauea.
"I've got a barrier up, but if you put your foot down you'll get burned."
Tenchi held his breath.
Looking down from the edge of the rock to below, he could see orange glowing lava bubbling and flowing.
"I heard it's 4,200 degrees."
She said it so casually.
"A human would evaporate in an instant, I imagine. I've got the barrier so I'm fine, but it'd be a little too hot to swim in."
"Don't say such terrifying things."
Even inside the barrier, he seemed to feel the heat.
"I like places like this."
Ryoko was gazing intently down at the crater.
"I dislike petty things. 'You said this,' 'No I didn't,' 'You bullied me,' 'No I didn't'—so bothersome."
Tenchi stole a glance at Ryoko and saw that her bright eyes had the orange flames reflected in them, glittering.
"It's probably because I've always been in a world with nothing but space and stars… but I like you."
A faintly shy smile crossed her face.
"There are times I want to tell you to be a little clearer about things."
"I think so myself."
Tenchi murmured in a strangely honest mood.
"When it comes to facing you directly, I tend to hold back. Things like—will it be bad to say this, will it hurt you…"
"That's the good thing about you."
Ryoko tightened the arm she had around Tenchi.
"If I let go of you right now, that'd be the end of you."
"Yeah."
The warmth Ryoko conveyed, contrary to her words, made something in Tenchi's chest feel warm.

"Ryoko isn't that kind of girl."
"Yeah…"
Ryoko's nose touched his neck.
"You're the only one. The only one who calls me a girl."
Because she is a girl.
Tenchi placed his hand over Ryoko's.
For some reason, doing that felt natural.
"How incredible… the power of nature."
Ryoko was even more incredible.

_____

Her strength, her power—in every way I can't hold a candle to Ryoko.
But her heart is that of an ordinary girl.
And because of that… I like her.

Silent together, how long had they been here?
The sound of a helicopter's rotors was heard, and Ryoko seemed to sharply raise her face.
"Let's go, Tenchi. That's a crater sightseeing chopper."
Ryoko teleported.
Where they ended up was not Waikiki Beach, but a small coastline with not a person in sight.
"Where is this?"
Tenchi looked around.
This was surely another tourist spot.
But there was no one here now.
"I don't know it either. But it's beautiful, right? Look…"
Sand trickled from Ryoko's fingers, an olive green, as she knelt on the beach.
The whole beach glowed in a faint olive green.
"Lots of people and loud celebrations are nice too, but when I was wandering around yesterday I spotted this place. I wanted to bring you here."
"Green sand—how unusual."
Tenchi searched his wet shorts pockets, but there was nothing he could put in them and take home.
"Once your clothes are dry, you can put some in your pocket. Just take your stuff off. Nobody's watching."
"Well…"
Tenchi hesitated, but it was too late to be embarrassed now.
After all, underneath he just had trunks on, and Ryoko had certainly seen him like this before.

The wet T-shirt and shorts were spread on the beach, and the two moved to a stepped rock face out of direct sunlight.
"Right then. You can sleep if you want."
"Hm?"
"Yesterday's incident with Ayeka kept you from sleeping properly, didn't it? I'll go play with the fish for a bit."
Ryoko smiled bashfully and started to step down to the beach.
"Wait."
Suddenly his stomach felt hollow.
"?"
Ryoko turned back with a curious look.
"Hey… would you stay here?"
"What?"
Ryoko burst out laughing.
"You're afraid of being alone, aren't you."
"No I'm not."
Tenchi felt embarrassed enough to look down at his feet.
"Actually, forget it. Just keep an eye on my clothes so they don't blow away."
"Okay. I'll stay here."
Ryoko sat down beside Tenchi and narrowed her eyes looking at the beach.
The white T-shirt had a rock on it, but its sleeves and hem were catching the breeze and fluttering.
"Shall we have a nap together?"
"What!?"
Without warning, Ryoko's hand came to his shoulder and pushed him down.
"I like you, Tenchi."
Ryoko's breath tickled his neck.
"Just for a little while. I don't need anything. It doesn't matter if nothing happens. Just a little… let me dream."
"Ryoko…"
Ryoko's hair had the mixed scent of sea and wind.
Tenchi lay there unable to move his arms, only listening to Ryoko's breathing.
Now, Ryoko's ear is pressed just above my heart, and her arms are holding my shoulder firmly.
Ryoko… is this okay? Am I enough for you… is it okay?
Contrary to feelings about to burst, Tenchi couldn't even move a finger.
If I lose myself now, I can never return to the world I'm in.
Once I step forward there's no going back…
"Ryoko?"

That thought alone kept Tenchi in check.
He could say nothing.
Perhaps he was afraid to put it into words.
"Mm…"
Ryoko stirred.
"It's fine… just as you are…"
Tenchi, caught between advance and retreat, gave himself up to a wave of melting happiness.
A small world made only of wind, waves, and sun.
Tenchi let his thoughts drift far.
Ryoko who had always watched me… watched only me.
Even when I was still small and knew nothing, she was there.
I…
Suddenly Ayeka's face floated up in his mind.
Ayeka was looking at Tenchi with a sad, resigned expression.
Tenchi felt his heart tremble for one moment.
That's not it, that's not it.
I can't choose yet.
I'm not yet old enough or mature enough for that.
How painful… if only I could hold Ryoko now, how happy I would be.
Tenchi closed his eyes.
His heart wavered, and even breathing felt painful.
Gradually the wave receded gently, and Tenchi slipped into a world without suffering.
At the instant the veil of sleep descended, Tenchi thought he definitely saw the vision of a woman laughing coldly.
The woman in the vision showed her palm in the American style and, with an ominous smile, crooked her finger and beckoned to Tenchi.

Chapter Eight:

Tenchi suddenly…

Tenchi suddenly woke.
He seemed to have fallen asleep just like that.
"Ryoko. Ryoko!"
"Mm…"
Ryoko rubbed her eyes and sat up, and grinned with an embarrassed smile.
"Fell asleep."
"Yeah…"
Tenchi leaped up.
"Oh no! I had to be back by noon!"
He ran hurriedly to the beach.
The T-shirt and shorts had dried completely and were covered in olive green sand.
"Oh no…"
He brushed off the sand as best he could and put the clothes on.
"What time is it? Ryoko, you don't have a watch, do you."
"Slept for quite a while, it seems."
Ryoko squinted up at the sun and pointed to the rock face.
"Look, the shadow has moved a lot. My guess is it's around two or three."
"Three?!"
Tenchi went dizzy.
"Ryoko, please! Let's go back right now."
"I think it's a bit late to rush."
Ryoko laughed loudly at Tenchi's panic and gave a big stretch.
"Well, fine. Let's go."
From the unknown beach to the hotel was just an instant.
As long as you didn't suddenly materialize in the middle of a crowd, teleportation was an extremely convenient ability.
"They'll probably all be gone by now."
Tenchi glanced at the lobby clock as he jogged.
The clock hands pointed to 2:45.

If everyone had gathered at noon, that made him two hours and forty-five minutes late.
"As expected…"
There was no one left at the restaurant.
The restaurant itself was on its break time before dinner, and there was a sign posted at the entrance.
"I'll try the room."
Tenchi turned distractedly back to look at Ryoko and headed toward the elevator hall.
"Then I'll be at the beach. A mobile phone would be handy at a time like this."
The last part she murmured to herself as Ryoko walked toward the beach.
On the way to the beach was a large pool.
If Mihokiyo and Sasami are together, they're bound to be at one or the other.
Ayeka and Washu will be together all day, and Dad is probably doing swimsuit-watching along the beach, and Grandpa is probably watching the sports channel at the beachside bar with a beer.
Ryoko, who had carefully read the guidebook before the trip but hadn't told anyone, had in fact memorized all of it.
In this respect she was something other than human—truly the daughter of Washu.
Sure enough, the Mihokiyo and Sasami combo was at the beach.
Wearing sun hats, hotel beach towels over their shoulders, and deep in the middle of making a sandcastle.
"Hey, Sasami-chan. That's a huge castle."
"Oh! Ryoko-nee-chan!"
Sasami immediately noticed and turned around.
"Can you tell what it is? It's the Juraian Royal Palace. They helped a lot, but…"
A smile that shone with the joy only a child playing in sand could have.
"Amazing! I thought it was the real thing."
Ryoko crouched down and peered closely at the sand Juraian Royal Palace.
"Did you have lunch?"
"Yes. Where did Ryoko-nee-chan go? And Tenchi-nii-chan?"
"We didn't have a watch so we didn't know what time it was."
She deflected smoothly.
"Really? Ayeka-san was quite worried about you."
Mihoshi didn't suspect a thing.
"Where did she go?"
"She said she was going shopping, and went off in a taxi with Washu-san."
Kiyone stood up and laughed as she whispered, pulling Ryoko by the ear.
"Hang on! Confess. Where did you go with Tenchi-san?"
"No interrogations, please."

Ryoko slipped away smoothly.
"Just doing a sightseeing tour. By teleportation. If you don't believe me, ask him yourself."
"Ask him? Where?"
Just then, Tenchi came running, out of breath.
"Kiyone-san! Mihoshi-san!"
"Tenchi-nii-chan, st-o-o-op!"
The Juraian Royal Palace narrowly avoided collapse.
"Oh, sorry, Sasami-chan."
Tenchi carefully moved his foot and smoothed out his footprint with his finger.
"Sorry I'm so late."
"Ayeka-san looked like she was about to cry."
Kiyone pretended to glare at Tenchi from the corner of her eye while suppressing a smile.
"Sightseeing tour with Ryoko, was it? Was it so fun you blew off lunch?"
"Well…"
What on earth did Ryoko tell them?
Tenchi sneaked a glance at Ryoko nervously.
"Ugh, how nice~ I had to babysit this one all day. I feel like a tour guide."
"What's that?"
Mihoshi looked up blankly.
"Nothing. Hey Sasami-chan, no matter how hard you work, when the tide comes in it'll all wash away."
"Yep, that's okay."
Sasami put the finishing touches on the last tower with great care and stood up, clapping her hands.
"Then Tenchi-nii-chan, the camera! You're late, so this is your punishment."
"Okay, okay. I'll take a great photo with you, Sasami-chan."
Tenchi inwardly rejoiced that the matter of his tardiness hadn't been pursued, and ran back toward the elevator hall.
"Ahh… first time I ever worked so hard building something."
Mihoshi looked down at the sand masterpiece with a smile.
"If we'd started building before noon, I might have forgotten the time too. That's what Hawaii is like."
"Yeah, maybe."
Ryoko burst out laughing.
"I bet this island's deity likes people like you. Your skin color even matches, and if you stuck some flowers on you could probably step right onto a stage."
"Really?"

Mihoshi laughed back happily.
"I seem to be in sync with this island. Because everyone here is so laid-back, right? The only ones rushing around are the tourists."
"These two—if I hadn't gone and gotten them hats and towels, they'd have collapsed from heatstroke by now."
Kiyone shrugged with a weary look.
"You understand my hardship now, don't you?"
"You need people like that too."
Ryoko agreed with unusual frankness.
"And where's Ryo-Ohki?"
"Taking a nap in the air-conditioned room. I mean, with that fur coat? Couldn't bring myself to wake her."
"Then I'll have an afternoon nap in preparation for tonight."
Just then, Tenchi came running back with his camera.
"Sasami-chan, sorry to keep you waiting! Come on, everyone line up."
Sasami, Ryoko, and Mihokiyo gathered around the sand Juraian Royal Palace and fit themselves into the frame.
"What's one plus one?"
"Twooo!"
This had become the standard pattern for commemorative photos lately.
"Tenchi-nii-chan, thank you! Hey, let's go swimming!"
Sasami jumped up and attached herself to him happily.
"Uh, sure."
"You were playing with Ryoko-nee-chan all morning, so now it's Sasami's turn!"
"What about Mihoshi-san and the others?"
Tenchi looked at the two first class detectives with an unspoken plea.
"I want to go shopping after all that swimming. Where Ayeka-san went."
"Ala Moana? I want to go too. After all, all the world's top brands are there. Dior, Gucci, Chanel, Hermès…"
Kiyone looked dreamily into the distance.
"Want to come? It's a bit late, but."
"Yes, yes, let's go!"
"What, the sisters are leaving?!"
Sasami raised a voice of protest.
"Then Sasami's going too! Tenchi-nii-chan, you come too!"
"Shopping, is it."
Tenchi felt a vague anxiety inwardly, but faced with this level of enthusiasm, he couldn't object.
"Ryoko… what will you do?"

"Obviously I'm coming."
Ryoko grinned.
"Tenchiiii, you're not going to leave me behind, are you?"
Even without Ayeka present, Ryoko's "Tenchiiii" attack.
"Y-yeah…"
A clear image of himself an hour in the future flashed into Tenchi's mind.
Himself staggering along three steps behind the shopping brigade, loaded down with a mountain of bags.
And to top it off, sitting on the edge of a fountain somewhere in the shopping center like a dog, counting the number of passersby.
And even when the count of passersby surpassed one hundred, still no sign of his master returning.
"Alright, get changed. I'll go get my wallet too."
"Yay! Let's get ice cream!"
Tenchi and the proto-shopping-brigade left the sand Juraian Royall Palace behind and headed for the elevator hall.

Chapter Nine:

Now, with the spirit-wave detector in hand…

Now, with the spirit-wave detector in hand, Washu and Ayeka had spent the morning scouring the hotel grounds and had come to Ala Moana Shopping Center in the afternoon.
This was the flagship enormous shopping center where you could supposedly find anything.
The combination of Ayeka in a white-collared one-piece that made her look like someone's well-bred daughter, and Washu in a Crazy Cats T-shirt that she looked like she'd just bought at a shop around the corner, made for a rather peculiar pair.
"Washu-san. I'm thoroughly tired of ghost-hunting. And Tenchi-sama never came back either…"
Ayeka walked listlessly along the second-floor street lined with world-renowned brands glittering like stars.
"The merchandise at these shops truly is something else."
Just where could Tenchi-sama be… what was he doing with Ryoko?
The most pressing question in the world at this moment was sitting in her heart, making Ayeka absentminded.
I mustn't think such things—thoughts that could amount to blaming Tenchi-sama.
He isn't that kind of person, and even if it were so, it would be my own inadequacy…
Oh, how miserable.
I feel terrible today. My body is dull and heavy.
What on earth has happened to me?
Ayeka stopped in front of one particular shop.
"That dress…"
It was a fresh rose-colored dress, the color of the dawning sky. The shoulders were folded-back off-the-shoulder style, leading from a fitted bodice to a gently flared skirt.

"…How beautiful."
Drawn in as if by a magnet, Ayeka entered the shop and gazed up at the dress in wonder.
I want to wear it… the mere thought made her heart pound.
I'll look like an Earth girl, surely.
Embarrassing, but I'll bare my shoulders and feet and let the southern breeze blow over me… I wonder if Tenchi-sama will see me in it?
Will he think I look lovely?
"May I help you find something?"
A shop assistant came over with a gentle manner.
"This one… please let me see it."
Running her fingers in wonder over the silk satin fabric, Ayeka felt that for the first time in her life she had fallen victim to materialism.
"May I try it on?"
"But of course."
The shop assistant offered an elegant smile, marking Ayeka as a prime customer, and led her to the fitting room.
"Washu-san, please help me."
Ayeka, her head full of the dress, called out for Washu like she was summoning a servant and closed the fitting room door.
"My, she's turned back into a princess."
Washu murmured but nonetheless fastened the zipper on the back, straightened the skirt, and adjusted everything.
The Ayeka in the mirror was the very embodiment of a newly bloomed rose.
"Does it suit me? Are the shoulders too bare, isn't the chest too open?"
"It looks absolutely wonderful, Lady Ayeka."
Washu smiled.
"You're so beautiful, Tenchi-dono will be astonished, I'm sure."
"……."
Ayeka gazed in wonder at herself in the mirror looking like a different person.
But the Jurai-style twin tails bound behind her head didn't suit this dress.
Ayeka hesitated for a moment, then twisted her two tails together, and pinned them up at the back of her head.
"I wonder what Father would say if he saw me…"
Looking down at her feet, her current shoes suddenly seemed to suit the dress not at all.
"I want shoes too… and a bag. Something befitting this dress."
Ayeka, awash in a happiness that permeated her whole being, was driven by a frustrating urgency.

So this is what shopping is—how exciting.
I finally understand why Kiyone-san and the others used to pour over the guidebook.
Opening the fitting room door, the shop assistant showered her with compliments.
"Magnificent! It suits you beautifully."
"Thank you."
Ayeka nodded graciously.
"I'll take this one."
Then Ayeka finally realized.
Just how much did this wonderful dress cost?!
"Three thousand five hundred dollars. When you've finished changing, please come to this counter."
Ayeka was troubled.
Three thousand five hundred dollars was quite a sum.
Ayeka had not a penny of cash on her, let alone a single card.
"No problem."
Washu pushed Ayeka back into the fitting room, produced a card from her pocket, and slipped it into Ayeka's hand.
"Pay with this. It would actually look stranger to pay in cash."
Washu closed the fitting room door and, wearing the expression of someone who had no connection whatsoever to sums like that, browsed the shop.
Ayeka looked at herself in the dress in the mirror once more.
Slipping the dress to the floor with regret, she picked up the one-piece she had been wearing.
That was when it happened.
"Miss Dior. A dress tailored for you."
A voice whispered in her ear, and before she could register it, a man's shadow materialized behind Ayeka.
"Careful, don't scream. If you scream like that in this state, you're the one who'll be embarrassed. You're beautiful. I don't want to see that happen to you."
All at once, every memory and all the fear she had forgotten came flooding back.
It was without question the man from last night, standing on the other side of the lanai.
"Stay still. I'm not going to do anything."
The man, lust seeping into his black eyes, put his hand on Ayeka's neck.
An icy cold seeped from the man's fingers, and Ayeka involuntarily flinched.
"Don't make a sound."
While keeping Ayeka fixed with his glittering eyes in the mirror, the man let his fingers slide along the back of her neck, traced the line of her shoulder, and brought his hand down to around her elbow.

In an instant, she felt both her arms seized with great force, and then the man's lips were pressed against Ayeka's bare shoulder.
Through the numbing pain, for a moment she thought she'd felt teeth.
"Good girl… I'll save the rest for tonight."
The man's reflection in the mirror lost its sense of reality and began to fade.
Ayeka's paralysis broke, freeing her from the state where she had no voice.
"Who… are you?!"
"Didn't I tell you?"
The man's voice dropped in mocking tones.
"Call me Batu. It means 'fellow' in Spanish. My mother gave me another name but I've long since forgotten it."
The man's form suddenly vanished, and only her own reflection—shaking in her underwear—was left in the mirror.
Where his lips had touched had become a livid red-black bruise like a bite mark.
Ayeka bit her lip, quickly dressed, and opened the fitting room door.
"What's the matter, ma'am? You don't look well."
The shop assistant's anxious voice and Washu sharply turning around came almost simultaneously.
"I'm quite all right."
Ayeka handed over the card, and gripped her hands tightly closed to suppress the agitation in her feelings.
"This, please."
"Certainly. This way, please."
While Ayeka was going through the payment process, Washu was glaring at the spirit-wave detector with a fierce expression.
The ghost in the window had been blinking at level 1—but the moment Ayeka came out, it had definitely jumped to level 10.
"Level 10! Energetically speaking, it wouldn't be strange if she were killed outright."
But Ayeka was alive.
Whatever had produced a level 10 spirit wave clearly had no intention of killing Ayeka.
"Lady Ayeka, what on earth happened?"
When payment was complete, Ayeka's face, holding the pure white Dior shopping bag, was as white as the bag.
"Washu-san, let me rest. I feel…"
"Understood."
Ayeka and Washu first went down on the escalator to the first floor and sat at the nearest table in Makai Market Place.
"Now, to get straight to the point—it appeared, didn't it?"

"Yes."
"The same man who stood on the lanai at night?"
Ayeka nodded and lowered the neckline of her one-piece to show Washu.
A vivid red-black bruise was clearly on her neck.
"I thought he materialized behind me, and he pinned my arms and forcibly…"
Ayeka bowed her head.
"Why? Why do I have to go through this? What did I do?!"
"He sounds like bad news."
Washu made a difficult face.
"Any more clues? Like a name, or where you first saw him."
"I should have told you sooner. But I couldn't remember."
Ayeka finally looked up and began to describe the events on the beach.
Washu nodded with her arms folded, and when the account was finished she furrowed her brow.
"Only Lady Ayeka could see him. I think it was merely a coincidence of resonance, but he didn't see it that way. He started following Lady Ayeka… but what is his purpose?"
"He surely intends to take me to the other side."
Recalling the man's stare, Ayeka shuddered.
"Washu-san, help me! I'm frightened… I dread the coming of night."
"Don't worry. We'll definitely protect you."
Washu asserted impulsively, but did not forget that the enemy still had the upper hand for now.
The opponent was a spiritual being.
And unlike ordinary spirits, it seemed capable of concealing its presence.
This would not be simple.
"Lady Ayeka's Juraian energy must have something about it that draws him to her. I want to know the reason… why he is fixated on Lady Ayeka."
Just then, Ayeka suddenly clasped her head.
"My head feels heavy… I can't put any strength into my body."
Ayeka's body suddenly seemed to sway.
"Washu-san, I… I'm being pulled in…"
"Lady Ayeka!"
There was nothing she could do.
The spirit-wave detector wasn't moving, yet it looked as if the life force was being drained from Ayeka's body.
Washu involuntarily grabbed Ayeka's hand and shouted in her ear.
"Hold yourself together! Your world is here. Focus your consciousness on your own hand!"
The breathless moment passed, and Ayeka looked up with a blank expression.

"Washu-san, I just… what happened to me?"
She's lost her memory again?!
Washu doubted her own ears.
"I want something to eat. Washu-san, could you lend me some money?"
Ayeka stood up with a vacant expression and started to walk off, only to trip on the chair.
"Look out!"
Washu immediately rose and grabbed Ayeka's arm.
"Something's wrong. I'm dizzy. My throat is so dry…"
Ayeka's face was deathly pale, and shadows had fallen on her normally full cheeks.
"Lady Ayeka, let's leave here. We're going back to the hotel."
Just then.
Lively voices could be heard from the direction they'd come, and Sasami came running with a big wave.
"Sis!"
"Sasami?"
Ayeka turned around.
"Ayeka-san, Washu-san!"
Mihoshi waving energetically, with Ryoko and a Tenchi loaded down with a mountain of bags came into view.
"We covered so much ground I can't believe we found you. It's a miracle."
Mihoshi beckoned Kiyone and Tenchi over and sat herself down in a free seat.
"More happiness, more happiness, more happiness—I can't take it! There are so many beautiful clothes and cute accessories and lovely sweets. Ah, I want to live at Ala Moana!"
"This one spent three days' worth of budget in two hours!"
Kiyone laughed with a resigned face.
"Tenchi-san, thank you. You didn't have to carry all of that. What would you like to drink? I'll treat you to anything."
"Oh, Ayeka-san, you've put your hair up. Did you find something nice?"
Tenchi set the bags down with a heave and pulled over an empty chair from a nearby table.
"Being a girl really is something, isn't it. Getting so absorbed in shopping like this. I wish I'd been born a girl too."
Ayeka with her hair up looked somehow gaunt, but Tenchi was considerate enough not to say anything.
"Hey Ayeka, what are you looking so worn out for?"
Ryoko spotted it sharp and peered in.
"Your color looks terrible. Did you find your ghost?"

"A g-ghost…"
Ayeka's gaze went vacant for a moment, then she shook her head as if to banish it.
"I did not encounter any ghosts. Please—someone get me something. I feel like I'm about to faint…"
"Yes, yes, I'll go get something, since I'm the tour guide. What would you like?"
As everyone cheerfully called out their orders, Washu felt fighting spirit rising inside her.
To think that little Washu-chan, greatest genius in the universe, is being run around by just one measly ghost!
Fine then, I'll do whatever it takes, even if I have to imitate an exorcist. I don't know who you are, but how dare you do this to Washu-chan!
"Washu-chan will have coffee. Black."
First I need to get back to the hotel and access the database. If I split the work with George, who I'll have to call in, somehow we should manage…
Washu intended to do a thorough sweep of Honolulu's death records.
She had a hunch it wouldn't be anything too far in the past.
For something that wasn't a strong enough lingering attachment—it would be difficult to maintain form and will for decades after death.
"Lady Ayeka, you must persevere."
Washu called to mind Ayeka's happy face when she was trying on the Dior dress.
It was just too pitiful, to leave things like this.
You're going to wear that dress and go on the sunset cruise with Tenchi-dono, aren't you?
What an admirable girl! Don't worry, I'll make sure your wish comes true.

Ahh… Washu-chan is being really serious this time.
Watching the somewhat calmer Ayeka's profile, Washu felt somewhat self-conscious about how worked up she'd gotten.
"In essence, this is it. Goodbye boredom for now, hello thrill and suspense."
"Washu-san, what are you mumbling about?"
Noticing that Ayeka's worn condition was weighing on him, Tenchi felt vaguely guilty and poked Washu's arm.
"Oh, nothing—I was just thinking that coffee is better when you make it yourself… that sort of thing."
Ayeka wasn't listening at all.
By this time, half of Ayeka's soul—or if that word is inappropriate, half of her life force—had been drained away into the darkness of the other side, and her physical body was desperately trying to maintain its life functions with the remaining half.

Chapter Ten:

It was that night.

It was that night.
From around evening, the wind grew stronger, and rain—unusual for Hawaii in peak season—began to fall.
Tenchi and the others gave up on going out and decided to have dinner at the hotel.
The grounds contained a truly wide variety of restaurants and shops—Western, Japanese, Chinese, all to choose from.
What Tenchi and the others chose was the Cantonese specialist restaurant, Golden Dragon, which had apparently ranked in Hawaii's top 20 (another quote from the guidebook)—a place that was luxurious and looked formal, but since it was a Chinese restaurant, families with children wouldn't be turned away.
Ryo-Ohki unfortunately couldn't be brought along, but Tenchi and the others savored the wonderful food, got caught up reporting on the day's events and had a pleasant time.
That is, if one set aside worries about Ayeka.
"It's the first time I've seen Sis eat so much."
Sasami rubbed her tummy and leaned back in her chair.
For a child, Sasami herself had eaten a reasonable amount.
"Yes, I myself am surprised."
Ayeka smiled with her usual bloodless face.
"Perhaps it's the air here? No matter how much I eat, I get hungry again right away."
"But still, your color doesn't look good. Are you all right? Don't upset your stomach."
Ayeka shook her head ambiguously and smiled.
Strange… the realization, belated, came clearly to her.
She was eating until her stomach was full, yet there was no sensation of it.
No feeling of satisfaction either.
She was simply eating out of a sense of crisis—I must eat, I must take in more nourishment.

Am I sick? Have I contracted some nameless illness and am going to die?
All at once, tears threatened to well up, and Ayeka hurriedly looked away.
The lush night scenery visible from Golden Dragon was battered by heavy raindrops tonight, subdued.
After so many unbroken sunny days, Ayeka had forgotten that it rained here too, that there were overcast days and stormy days.
"Rain is lovely too…"
Ayeka murmured to no one in particular.
The concentrated green scent rising from the rain-beaten plants and trees of the south, and Ayeka was reminded of the distant air of Jurai.
Ah, if I could immerse myself in this air, perhaps my illness would be cured.
Half of my life is something that was granted by the royal family's tree, so this planet's soil—which took in the Funaho tree—and the plants living on this soil must surely accept me too…
"Ayeka-san?"
Tenchi noticed the vacant expression on Ayeka's face and felt clearly that something was wrong.
This was not the Ayeka he knew.
She was a woman of supple flexibility, like a young tree just beginning to bud, gentle yet with a powerful life force pulsing within her like the energy of nature.
"What's the matter, Ayeka-san?"
The Ayeka before him now was as frail as a seedling beginning to wither.
"Hm?"
Ayeka turned with a half-dreaming look.
"I think you should rest. I've been worried since we met at Ala Moana."
"Yes… yes, you're right. Tenchi-sama, I'm sorry to impose, but would you lend me your hand?"
Normally she would have blushed in embarrassment.
No—she wouldn't ask for help getting up from a chair to begin with.
"Ayeka-san…"
Ayeka barely managed to stand, taking Tenchi's hand.
"I'd like to go to the garden. Please take me there."
"Is that all right? If something's wrong, maybe a hospital…"
"Take her."
Katsuhito, who had been watching silently until now, spoke.
"We'll come after you."
"…Okay."
"I'll go too. Lead the way."

With Washu accompanying them, Tenchi felt somewhat relieved, and lent Ayeka his arm as they left the restaurant.
Through the quiet lobby and down a short flight of stairs was a small pond where waterfowl rested.
"You'll get wet if you go outside."
"Yes…"
Ayeka let go of Tenchi's hand and walked unsteadily to the side of the pond.
Flamingos sheltering from rain in the bushes woke and raised their heads.
Ayeka touched the rain-wet leaves, stroked the flowers tenderly, and pressed her cheek against the trunk of a tree.
The rain pouring down and the water droplets gathered on the leaves soaked Ayeka, and her eyes filled with a feverish warmth.
The area, normally busy with people until late at night, was empty tonight because of the rain.
"Warm… like rain falling on the summer palace at Jurai…"
Ayeka tilted her throat upward and closed her eyes.
In an instant, large raindrops soaked Ayeka's hair and her one-piece.
The weight of her wet hair pulled out pins, and her two tails slid down her back.
"Ayeka-san, we should go in… Washu-san, is it all right to leave her?"
"Wait! I want to see what happens. He might come."
"Who?"
Washu held out the spirit-wave detector to Tenchi.
"This—this. I didn't build the spirit-wave detector for nothing. Ayeka-san has met a ghost three times now. But none of us have seen it. I want to know. What form it has and what kind of voice. To protect Lady Ayeka, we must first know the enemy."
"Sis!"
"How is Ayeka?"
Katsuhito and Sasami came over with concern.
"What are you doing? Standing out in the rain?"
Tenchi and Washu looked at each other.
"It feels wonderful."
Ayeka turned.
"Let me stay here for a little while."
"Sis, you're soaking wet. You'll catch a cold."
"I'm fine."
Ayeka walked away, leaving a worried-looking Sasami, toward the pool.
When she reached the poolside, she suddenly dropped to her knees and leaned out over the water's surface as if peering in.

"Look, Sasami. I can see the summer palace where Grandmother stayed. How nostalgic… Grandmother is waving her hand…"
"No!"
Katsuhito rushed past Tenchi like the wind, and Washu cried out almost simultaneously.
"Tenchi-dono, grab Lady Ayeka!"
"Ayeka, you're seeing an illusion! Get away from the pool!"
"Ayeka-san!!"
That was when it happened.
A man's arm thrust out from inside the pool and seized Ayeka's arm.
"Kyaaaah!"
Sasami, who had been about to run down the stairs, froze.
"Grandmother…?"
Ayeka raised her vacant eyes.
The man's form slowly rose from the water's surface.
In the mercury lamp light, only the aloha shirt he was wearing stood out clearly.
The rest was nothing but shadow.
The man's body was made of shadow.
The arm gripping Ayeka's arm, the legs floating just above the water's surface—raindrops passed through them without resistance.
Only his eyes glittered and blazed like volcanic fire.
"Batu…"
Reason returned to Ayeka's eyes.
"Let go! I said let go!"
"Accursed spirit!"
Katsuhito smoothly drew the Lighthawk Sword and slashed at the shadow arm.
With no resistance whatsoever, the blade of light passed clean through the man's arm.
"Ayeka-san, hold on!"
Tenchi held Ayeka's cold, wet body tightly.
"Who are you?! Don't touch Ayeka-san!"
"Shove off, kid. Stay out of this."
A low, grating voice struck his ears contemptuously.
"This woman is mine. It took me two days to win her over. Get in my way and I'll kill you."
"Let go!"
Katsuhito's Lighthawk Sword flashed once toward the man's neck.
"Are you a shogun? Kamikaze, harakiri, Fujiyama, Nippon!"
A contemptuous laugh leaked from the man's open mouth.
"I'll take the geisha. Keep the change!"

The man's eyes flared, and before Tenchi could register it he was flung aside.
"Tenchi-sama, help—"
Before she could finish, Ayeka's body went limp.
"Ayeka!"
If Katsuhito hadn't caught her instantly, Ayeka's body would have tumbled straight into the pool.
"So long, kid."
The man's shadow suddenly leaped and rose high above the water's surface.
In the man's arm was Ayeka's form, glowing faintly like a sea firefly.
Hands, face, all translucent, as if she might disappear at any moment.

That is… a soul…?

Tenchi's hand unconsciously took the stance for the Lighthawk True Sword.
Light gathered, taking the form of a sword.
"Wait, monster!"
The man's face opened in a mocking grin and a red light seeped out.
A mask-like, cruel smile.
And in that instant, everything disappeared entirely.
Tenchi reached out his empty hand and stared blankly at the air.
Rain fell ceaselessly from the dark sky and wet Tenchi's face.
"Sis…?"
Katsuhito silently lifted Ayeka in his arms.
"Sis, what happened? Wake up!"
Sasami grabbed her sister's powerlessly hanging arm and desperately shook it.
"Sis… wake up, please!"
Sasami's bright eyes filled with tears.

Tenchi finally shifted his gaze to Ayeka, cradled in his grandfather's arms.
"Surely…"
"It's all right. She's not dead."
"Washu-chan has been made a fool of…!"
Washu clenched her fist and bit her lip.
"Katsuhito-dono, please hurry her to the room."
Katsuhito nodded with a stern expression and headed briskly toward the elevator hall.

When they returned to the room, a storm of questions awaited them.
"Ayeka-san?!"
"What happened? What happened to Ayeka-san?"

"The mononoke stole her soul."
Katsuhito laid the unconscious Ayeka on the bed and placed his hand on her forehead.
"Turn off the air conditioning. Someone, get a towel!"
Washu quickly stripped Ayeka's wet clothes and with Kiyone's help changed her into dry ones.
She carefully dried the wet hair.
"A mononoke? So what Lady Ayeka said was true? What on earth—"
Mihoshi teared up and rubbed Ayeka's hand.
"It's cold. It won't warm up at all."
"Her life activity has dropped to the minimum level. She won't die immediately, but if it drags on, it will be dangerous."
"Die…?!"
Tenchi still stood dazed, watching as Washu and the others busied themselves caring for Ayeka.
He couldn't believe what had happened before his eyes.
"I made an oversight. I suppose I am getting old."
Katsuhito looked truly crestfallen as he knelt beside Ayeka, then suddenly stood and looked out the window with eyes that could pierce the darkness.
"Grandpa… what happened to Ayeka-san? Isn't this Ayeka-san? Isn't she just unconscious?"
Without meaning to, his tone grew fierce.
"Tenchi, you saw it yourself. He took Ayeka away. If you dislike calling it a soul, then he took away the very consciousness that makes that child who she is. What lies here is an empty shell."
"That can't be…"
Tenchi staggered.
"Can that really happen? Isn't my consciousness inside my own head? Consciousness separating from its body while the body is still here and wandering off…"
"The hardware is here. The software has been stolen. Hey, Mihoshi. Get out of the way for a second."
Ryoko, who had been silently watching until now, spoke.
"Ryoko-nee-chan, do you know what happened to Sis?"
Ryoko lightly patted Sasami's hand in comfort, then went to Ayeka's side and pressed her own forehead against Ayeka's.
"Far away… but still connected. I don't know what his purpose is, but—don't worry. There's still time."
"Where is she?"
Sasami leaped up.
"Sasami is going to look! We'll get Sis back!"

"Ryoko, do you know? Tell me!"
Tenchi, looking as if he might run out of the room any second, shouted.
"Wait. The location isn't clear yet."
Ryoko furrowed her brow.
"The Ayeka over there will regain consciousness eventually. It's not too late after that. But the Ayeka here is going to be sleeping for a while, I'm afraid."
Ryoko pulled her forehead away and lightly poked the unconscious Ayeka on the cheek.
"Honestly, I told you so. I said no trouble. Seems you're the type to draw bad men to you. Princesses are such a pain."
"How do you know?"
Ryoko's words saved Tenchi, who had been starting to lose it.
"Astral Link. I can search in all directions simultaneously. Never needed it on Earth, so I'd forgotten all about it."
"Well now, Ryoko being a good girl. I'd completely forgotten about that too. Have I got Earth-brain?"
"Washu-san!"
Those two really…!
Tenchi felt the tension drain away and slumped onto the bed.
"Oh, Tenchi-dono. I do apologize."
Washu had already reverted to her usual genius-scientist expression.
"I thought my heart was going to stop."
"If your heart stopped every time something like this happened, you'd run out of hearts."
Despite the light tone, her sharp eyes were checking on Ayeka's condition.
"Right then, instead of everyone just crowding in here, those who want to sleep, sleep, and those who are staying up will take turns standing watch. Tenchi-dono, you have circles under your eyes."
"I'm staying up."
Tenchi insisted stubbornly.
"If I had been more careful, this wouldn't have happened…"
"It would have. He'd been waiting for a chance to take her all along."
Washu frowned.
"I'm so furious. A ghost made a fool of me!"
"Um… is Ayeka-san going to be all right?"
Nobuyuki, looking worried, interjected.
"If there's anything I can do, please say the word. For now, shall I put the kettle on?"
"Please. Nobuyuki-dono, you really are a wonderful person."
"There's nothing I can do, so…"

Nobuyuki looked at the listless Ayeka and felt sadness alongside anger.
Any ghost, any mononoke—it made no difference.
The wish of a father whose daughter had been taken was just one thing—to grab that evil man and punch him senseless.
At least, here on Earth, Ayeka-san and Sasami-chan and Ryoko were all cherished daughters.
"If only I had more power…"
Nobuyuki, unable to punch the invisible enemy, thought of something a little more likely to be useful.
"Washu-san, I happen to know one parapsychological researcher. If he hasn't moved, he should be near the University of Hawaii."
"Nice follow!"
Washu clapped her hands and smiled.
"Can you get in touch with him tomorrow? I'm going to access the Honolulu Police database under the name Batu for starters."
"I'll help too."
Kiyone offered her assistance.
"Mihoshi, you go sleep with Sasami-chan."
"Okay, Kyo-chan."
"Then I'll be on watch with Tenchi…"
"Ryoko!!"
At the sound of Tenchi's voice, everyone in the room trained their eyes on Ryoko with reflexive precision.
"…What's wrong with standing watch together?!"
Ryoko sulked and vanished.
"Sorry, Ryoko. That was my fault."
There was no reply, but Ryoko's presence remained in the room.
Tenchi sighed with relief and smiled.
Things had started to move.
Surely everything would work out.
"Ayeka-san, I'll come for you."
Tenchi whispered toward Ayeka's white face.
Of course there was no reply, but for a moment Ayeka's expression seemed to ease.

Chapter Eleven:

From that night through dawn…

From that night through dawn, time passed with nothing to show for it.
Washu accessed the Honolulu Police database together with Kiyone under the name Batu, and also checked the death records, but there was not a single hit.
Identifying a person from the nickname Batu alone in the vast criminal files was next to impossible.
Especially if that person was dead.
Of course—Washu thought—there was no certainty he was, or had been, a criminal.
But that aura of evil had been something felt in the flesh.
Something that could radiate such a powerful evil aura could not, it seemed, have had a decent death.
Probably, when alive, this person had also been involved in something not very decent.
Thinking about the way he'd been stalking Ayeka suggested they were not far off.
Washu and Kiyone were searching on like that, changing angles and approaches.
"Ugh, no good."
Washu cracked her neck and stretched.
"Tenchi-dono, you're still awake."
"Yes."
Tenchi mechanically gave an answer.
Even he found it mysterious that he could keep his eyes open.
"But Ryoko has gone off somewhere, and Grandpa and Father are asleep, and Kiyone-san should be given a rest too, if we can. And also, I… wasn't able to protect Ayeka-san."
"You don't have to blame yourself so much."
"I'm fine with it."
Tenchi pressed his eyes.
And if I sleep I have strange dreams… he added inwardly.
But I'm nearly at my limit now.

Even an hour lying down would be good.
Tenchi slowly went back to Ayeka's bedside.
His head ached from staring at the monitor screen with Washu for so long.
"After all, not knowing what the face looks like is a problem. Only Lady Ayeka knows his face, and we can hardly just wake her and ask."
"Yes."
"From what Lady Ayeka told us, we don't even know what ethnicity he belongs to. Hawaii, just like America, is a melting pot of races—'dark-complexioned skin' applies to anyone who's lived here for a while. Just because he uses a Spanish nickname doesn't mean he's Spanish. I can't even establish the time frame. I've found a few likely-seeming candidates, only to find them still alive."
"Yes."
Thanks to a large amount of coffee and Washu's chatter, he'd managed to stay awake, but now he only had enough energy to nod.
"He might not be a resident. He could be a tourist, or a long-term visitor. Age unknown, nationality unknown. What we know is gender, skin color, and nickname. Oh—and that he's dead."
"Yes."
"We can't even do profiling, Kiyone-dono was grumbling. After all, the opponent is a ghost. Probably Latin American, short in stature, at least under thirty-five—involved in dirty business, drugs or prostitution. Lived somewhere not too high-end near Honolulu… a condo or townhouse. Cause of death probably a dispute over a deal or some trouble with a woman. But there are mountains of people fitting these conditions just in the past ten years, and this is only a likely example at that—she said. It really is America, even if it is a resort."
No nod came back.
Washu looked over and saw that Tenchi had collapsed face-down on Ayeka's bed, fast asleep.
"…Such a stubborn one."
Washu smiled and looked out at the pre-dawn ocean.
The rain had stopped, and the boundary between the horizon and sky was beginning to turn faintly white.
Soon a magnificent sunrise would bring a clear and cheerful morning.
Despite such an incident, Hawaii was surely still a wonderful place.
Washu thought about creating a research branch here—moving the subspace corridor somewhere more suitable and setting it up here.
Then she could come any time she liked, just one step.
Without bothering with planes, large sums of money, and time.

The only drawback was that once you were here, any desire to study diligently or do research disappeared.
Well, that might not be such a bad thing.
Even if the only purpose for the branch was to sit in the shade of a tree reading while drinking Kona coffee, it would be worth it.
"Cobbler, stick to your trade. Better leave ghosts to the mediums."
Washu sighed, unusually.
Supernatural things weren't her strong suit.
She'd have preferred to solve this without relying on shamans or the like.
What a sneaky way to go about things—creeping around, Washu muttered.
That man, Batu, was probably not much of anything when he was alive.
A big fish would have left some trace in the records, and whether they did good things or bad, someone who died having done everything they wanted in life—well, that was a kind of fulfillment.
If you die cleanly, you don't become a ghost.
That meant there must be an extraordinary lingering attachment to this world.
A woman? Money? Or life itself?
"A woman."
Washu murmured.
She had no certainty, but money alone wouldn't produce the kind of attachment that persisted inescapably even after death. You can't take money to the other world.
"There's always a proper reason for becoming a ghost. The thing about the buried gold coins you're too worried about to leave—that's a fairy tale. Something more like the vinyl bag full of cocaine you threw in the toilet cistern and can't stop thinking about—that's more in keeping with the times."
Suddenly a voice was heard, and Ryoko materialized.
"Oh, Ryoko-chan. Back already, you delinquent."
"Just went out for some night air. So, found anything?"
"No hits."
Washu spread both hands American-style and shrugged.
"I wish there were a ghost registry."
"Man, that's pathetic. Want me to share some inside info?"
Ryoko looked down at Washu with a smug expression.
"Batu has a woman. A blonde, apparently gorgeous."
Washu, who had been listening with a detached air, sent a sharp glance her way.
"Ryoko, where did you get that?"
"You should have just asked me from the start."
Ryoko smirked.

"I rough-handled some of the ones floating around nearby. Took some effort. Ghosts in general are so wrapped up in themselves they're completely indifferent to everyone else."
Washu felt like saying that's the same with the living—but suppressed it and asked in return.
"What is Batu exactly?"
"No idea. Unlike the other earthbound spirits, he goes around all over with the ghost of a blonde woman in tow. Seems to be a real insidious bastard—fix him with a look that could strangle you if your eyes drifted even slightly toward his woman."
"His real name? Cause of death?"
"Nobody knows. Nobody asks those things, they said. Which, fair enough—if you grab someone riddled with bullet holes and ask them why they died, that's a bit much. Ghosts show up in the form they had when they died as a rule, and if someone's standing at a crossroads with shattered bones and organs flying about you can tell at a glance they were in an accident."
"Nobody asked for all that."
Washu furrowed her brow.
"So basically—nothing is solved at all. If we at least knew the blonde woman's name…"
Washu snapped her fingers and tossed the keyboard into subspace.
"Seems faster if I go around asking questions with you. After breakfast, let's get moving. I'll rest until then."
The last part turned into a huge yawn.
"Come on, at least one word of praise."
Ryoko grumbled as she stretched out on the sofa.
"That Tenchi—so he fell asleep in the end."
"He'd been awake the whole time."
Washu looked at Tenchi's sleeping face and smiled.
When asleep, probably because his features were rounded, he looked much younger.
"How's Ayeka-san? Still no luck?"
Ryoko sat up and quietly pressed her own forehead to Ayeka's.
"No luck. Still no consciousness on the other side."
Washu sighed.
"Things don't go well, do they. But every night comes to an end. Look…"
Washu glanced out the window.
On the horizon, the beginning of a wonderful day was arriving with orange flames.
Today looked set to be a hot day, a complete turnaround from yesterday.

One hour later.
"AGHHHH!"

A tremendous scream jolted Ryoko and then Washu awake.
"What happened, Tenchi?!"
"What's wrong?"
Tenchi bolted upright. Ryoko and Washu stared at him.
"What? You having a nightmare?"
Just then Tenchi suddenly jolted upright again.
"Was I asleep? I was here, wasn't I?"
This time Washu was taken aback.
"What do you mean? What did you see?"
"It was Batu. No doubt about it."
Tenchi involuntarily grabbed Washu's hand.
"Washu-san, I saw it. A house like a villa, a blonde woman inside, and a dark-complexioned man coming in."
"A blonde woman?"
Ryoko pressed closer.
"Wait. You said it was definitely Batu? What about Ayeka-san?"
"…I didn't see her. No, wait."
Tenchi furrowed his brow as if trying to hold on to fading memories.
"I didn't see her. But Batu was… I keep seeing the same dream over and over. A blonde woman at the home bar, me sitting on the sofa drinking a cocktail, a white lace curtain swaying at the open window, and the ocean beyond the palm trees…"
"Why didn't you say so sooner?"
Tenchi looked at Washu's face and blinked.
"My memory wasn't reliable. Besides, I've barely slept at all… and I was scared."
Suddenly the color drained from Tenchi's face.
"Something terrible is going to happen in that house… everyone dies… blood splattered on the lace curtain…"
"Tenchi! Hey, pull yourself together!"
Tenchi snapped back.
"Ryoko, we need to find the house. Everything will become clear if we go there. I can clearly remember what the interior looked like. The woman's name was Pamela. The villa was hers. I was probably called there as a substitute for someone."
"A substitute?"
Ryoko tilted her head.
"I don't know. Pamela probably had a young lover. She called me 'boy'…"
"Pamela, Batu, and a young lover. If that's true, things are becoming clearer."
Washu produced her keyboard again and started working.
"She's not in the death records. Is Pamela her real name?"
"I don't know."

Tenchi answered honestly.
"Hit a dead end pretty quickly."
Washu murmured.
"The only clue is that villa. Well, knowing even that much is lucky. Tenchi-dono—any interest in going back to sleep?"
"Hm?"
"If you've seen that far, I'd like you to see the second half."
Tenchi shook his head.
"Not right now. I can't possibly sleep."
"Understandable."
Washu glanced at the clock.
"It's past seven. Let's wake everyone up and go get breakfast. Today is going to be a busy day."
"Got it!"
Ryoko phased through the walls to go wake the adjacent members up, and twenty minutes later, everyone except Katsuhito staying beside Ayeka had gathered in the same restaurant as the day before and was wolfing down breakfast.

Chapter Twelve:

"Hey, Kiyone....

"Hey, Kiyone. Do you think Pamela is still alive?"
"Who knows… from what Ryoko-san said, she was walking around with a ghost. She's probably dead, isn't she?"
"Yeah… I suppose so."
Kiyone and Mihoshi were walking toward a real estate agency on Kalakaua Avenue.
In her bag was a single floor plan.
A villa floor plan that Washu had drawn up based on Tenchi's account.
"Will this really lead anywhere?"
"If we're lucky."
Kiyone glanced at the shops lined up along the way with envy.
Kalakaua Avenue was the main street of Honolulu.
Lined with the finest hotels and shopping centers in Hawaii, if they weren't walking for this reason, how enjoyable it would be—such was the liveliness of the place.
"Hopefully we find it at the first one."
The two walked into a real estate agency called Beachcomber Realty.
"This looks like a beach house."
The sales agent said, looking at the floor plan.
"Or an island house. A single-story standalone near the ocean—it'd be one or the other. It's not one of our listings so I can't be sure, but if it's a beach house, it'd be faster to go straight to the North Shore and look in person. Island houses tend to be older buildings, though. We have some great new listings if you're interested."
"Oh, no, that's quite all right. Thank you very much."
Mihokiyo made a quick retreat.
"It's like looking for a contact lens dropped on Waikiki Beach."
"I actually thought we'd find it fairly easily…"
Ever unable to lose hope, Mihoshi was checking the map for the next real estate agency.
"A needle in a desert."

Kiyone sighed.
"No, it's the Southern Cross twinkling in the night sky."
Mihoshi raised her fist and looked up at the broad daylight sky.
"What do you mean?"
Kiyone burst out laughing.
"I mean the house is going to guide us to it."
Mihoshi smiled.
"After two or three more, shall we stop for lunch? Washu-san gave us a mobile phone, you know—there might be a call from Tenchi-san and the others who went to the University of Hawaii side."
"What does that have to do with lunch?"
Kiyone retorted, but inwardly a hope glimmered—lunch at Banyan Veranda.
"Oh, that's right—high tea doesn't start until the afternoon."
"What?"
Mihoshi turned around.
"Talk about afternoon tea. For lunch, anything will do."
"Kiyone-chan, are you actually working?"
Mihoshi dreamily fixed her eyes on a brand-name shop window.
"Are you?"
She snatched the map that was about to slip from Mihoshi's hand.
Since their days at the Police Academy, this was always how it went—they knew each other's rhythms through and through.
The two checked four real estate agencies in the end, but there was not a single hit.
They rushed into the international food court half-starved.
That was when it happened.
"Kiyone-san? How are things over there?"
A call came in on the mobile from Tenchi.
"Hiii, it's Mihoshi! I'm eating saimin right now—it's Hawaiian ramen. The soup is amazing! It's so delicious!"
"Not that!"
Tenchi burst out laughing.
"Actually, you see…"
Mihoshi picked up the phone in one hand and started slurping noodles. Kiyone hurriedly snatched it back.
"Sorry about that. Tenchi-san? Nothing at all on our end. We tried the name Pamela too, but it was grasping at clouds."
"I see… I figured as much. It was a complete failure on our end too.
The researcher—he's not quite a psychic, more of a researcher. A phone call isn't ideal. How about tea later?"

"Of course, yes!"
Kiyone involuntarily put down her chopsticks and poked Mihoshi on the shoulder.
"Sheraton Moana Surfrider, Banyan Veranda, at three. Is that okay?"
"That works. We're just about to have lunch too."
With the promise of seeing them later, the call ended.
"Yay!"
Kiyone took Mihoshi's hand with wide eyes and slapped it together Galaxy Police-style.
"We can have the most elegant tea in Honolulu! Be happy!"
"What's Banyan Veranda?"
Mihoshi slurped up the last of her noodles.
"Didn't you read the guidebook? You can have lovely British-style tea and sweets. Sandwiches, scones, tarts…"
"Yay!"
Mihoshi, finally grasping the meaning, made a late victory pose.
"Kiyone, you really are full of knowledge."
"Call me a walking guidebook!"
Kiyone slurped down her noodles at a tremendous speed, then produced a handkerchief and elegantly dabbed the corners of her mouth.
"I would have loved to bring Ayeka-san here. She'd definitely enjoy this kind of thing."
Mihoshi drew pictures in the saimin soup that had spilled on the table.
"Yeah… only two days left."
Kiyone was startled.
Only two more days until they went home.
If Ayeka-san didn't come back to herself by then, we'd all…
"I'll access the database again when we get back to the hotel. This time I'll go through murder cases from roughly the past ten years. I think that's a faster approach."
"I have a feeling."
Mihoshi wiped her dirty fingers on Kiyone's handkerchief and began speaking in a leisurely voice.
"Pamela-san has been thinking about that house all along. She wants to go back there. That's why she appeared before Tenchi-san. She was asking—find it for me, take me home."
"Why…? If she's a ghost, can't she go wherever she likes?"
"She can't. She's tied down. She can't go anywhere."
"An earthbound spirit?"
"I don't know."
Mihoshi looked around the shop as if suddenly woken.
"Hey, shall we have ice cream?"
"Mihoshi!"

Kiyone burst out laughing.
"Wait a little longer. Something even tastier is coming in just a bit."
"Okay."
Mihoshi nodded obediently and left the shop.
Of course Kiyone paid the bill.

The two groups united at Banyan Veranda, gave their reports for a while, and then sat quietly sipping the flavorful tea.
Tenchi's group included Nobuyuki, Washu, and Sasami.
At the hotel were Ryoko and Katsuhito, with Ryoko keeping watch over Ayeka. Should any change occur, she would immediately contact Washu on the mobile.
That had been agreed.
"I wonder if Sis is okay."
Sasami poked at a tart and murmured in a subdued voice.
"Sasami-chan, aren't you eating much?"
"Because Sis isn't here…"
A single tear dropped onto Sasami's hand.
"It's like a garden from Jurai here. In Jurai, Sis and I used to have tea in the garden like this a lot. I wonder what's happened to Sis."
Sasami wiped her tears with her dress sleeve and took Mihoshi's hand.
"Couldn't the girls find the house? Maybe it's not on this island?"
"That's not impossible."
Even Washu was looking haggard now.
"But please, could you go one more time tomorrow? There are five real estate agencies on the North Shore. If those don't pan out, I'll use emergency measures."
"Emergency measures?!"
Tenchi looked up in surprise.
"Yes."
Washu's expression tightened.
"I'll separate Ryoko's body and consciousness and synchronize her with Tenchi-dono. While Tenchi-dono sleeps and the dream house appears, I'll transfer Ryoko's spiritual body there."
"That means…"
"There's a possibility she can't return. If it's a trap, that is… like what happened to Lady Ayeka."
Washu wasn't looking at anyone—she was looking straight ahead.
"But without doing that, there's no way into the dream. Right? The question is where Lady Ayeka is being hidden. It's been nearly a full day and Ayeka-dono on the other

side still hasn't woken—that strongly suggests she's being held somewhere. If we make no further progress, finding that will be Ryoko's job."
"I'll go!"
Tenchi involuntarily stood up, noticed the eyes around them, and sat back down.
"I'm sorry. I… couldn't do anything."
"I'm the one who couldn't do anything."
Nobuyuki slumped his shoulders.
"I'm sorry, Washu-san. I wasted your time."
"Oh, the conversation with the parapsychologist itself was interesting."
Washu softened her expression.
"Nobuyuki-dono's friend is the kind of rational American who doesn't veer into the occult. I'd love to see him again. If I build a research branch here, I'd definitely like to call on him."
"WHAT?!"
A quintet of stunned cries had the surrounding guests all turning to look.
"Hawaii. Ghosts and Japanese culture that merged through immigration—that was compelling. The idea that mujina and fox spirits and kasha were imported along with the immigrants. I can get behind that kind of talk. Between us, I'm actually not very good at actual shamany stuff."
"No, that's not it!"
Tenchi finally found a moment to interject.
"You intend to build a research branch here?"
"Is that a problem? It's a wonderful place. When it's complete, anyone can come freely whenever they like."
"Oh, there's nothing wrong with it, but… you always spring things on us like that so suddenly."
"I'm on board!"
Nobuyuki leaned forward.
"I have my own memories tied to this place. I spent a lot of time here in my student days… the studying was hard, but."
"WHAT?!"
A second quintet of stunned cries made the surrounding guests frown.
"Father, student days…"
"Didn't I mention? I studied abroad at the University of Hawaii."
"Ohhhh…"
"People are never what they appear to be."Mihoshi murmured in admiration.
"You should have said so sooner."
"I'm a surprisingly modest person by nature." Nobuyuki winked at his son.

"I was afraid someone would ask how my English ended up like this after studying here. Actually, I dropped out and came home partway through, so I didn't finish the degree."
"So that's how it is…" Tenchi was impressed.
"Here I am sweating buckets over a simple purchase."
"We've stayed too long. Let's head back to the hotel." Washu grabbed the receipt and stood.
"The surrounding guests are thinking: why are all these Japanese tourists so loud?" Washu whispered to Tenchi.
"When actually we're a genius scientist, first-class detectives, and associates of the Juraian royal family. Well, that's how truth works. A ghost is just a dead person when you get down to it. Don't stress too much. Tenchi-dono has already come through much harder situations. Lady Ayeka is the same. She's not as fragile as she looks."
"Thank you, Washu-san."
Tenchi was relieved and smiled back.
"Right. It's not possible that Ayeka-san would just stay like that forever, is it."
"She'd come back to haunt us if she died just like that."
Washu secretly smiled, thinking of the dress Ayeka had bought and not yet worn once.

Chapter Thirteen:

Ayeka awoke from infinite darkness…

Ayeka awoke from infinite darkness.
It had been darkness that seemed as if it would go on forever—since being seized by Batu's cold hands.
A dreamless sleep, held in freezing arms.
Is this death? Does dying… mean this…?
If so, then death is not frightening at all.
Nothing can be felt.
Nothing is there.
Nothing…
Just a blood-red darkness continuing forever.

Ayeka awoke from infinite darkness.
There was no one.
No one could be seen.
No one was watching.
A red darkness spread before her, continuing forever.
Ayeka's consciousness flew through the darkness, flew and flew, and returned to the same place.
Beginning and end were joined together, with no break anywhere.

Ayeka awoke from infinite darkness.
Before she woke, darkness continued.
After she woke, darkness continued.
The darkness was red and dim, filled with blood wherever one went.
Ayeka flew through the blood-scented darkness, her body filled with blood all the way inside, overflowing from her throat, and traversed the same road again and again and again.
There was no exit anywhere.

No entrance, and even light could not reach here.
Someone, someone, someone!
Help me!
Save me from this infinity!
Save me from this nightmare…

Ayeka awoke from infinite darkness.
She had no more strength even to fly.
Ayeka crawled, ran out of strength and stopped, and crawled again.
A blood-colored darkness lay ahead.
At the infinite distance, an eternal beginning waited.
Ayeka resisted no more.
Even so, driven by instinct's command, Ayeka continued forward.
To stop was to end right there.
Time, consciousness—all ended there.
Frozen forever in the darkness…

"Tenchi-sama—!!"
In that instant, a scream that seemed to rend the earth pierced the darkness.

In a room in the critical care ward at Queens Hospital in downtown, a woman heard that scream.
No change crossed the woman's expression, but for an instant, the EEG needle swung to its maximum.
There was no one in the room, so no one noticed the anomaly.

Tenchi suddenly raised his face.
An indescribable trembling ran through his entire body.
"Washu-san! Ayeka-san—"
"I heard."
Washu stared ahead with a stern expression at the congested Kuhio Avenue.
Tenchi and the others were still on their way back to the hotel on the number 8 bus.
"We'll get off at the next stop. Mihoshi-dono and Kiyone-dono, please take Sasami-chan and go back to the hotel. Nobuyuki-dono, please."
"Understood."
Nobuyuki nodded, overwhelmed by Washu's urgency.
Tenchi and Washu got off the bus as it came to Fort DeRussy Park on Kuhio Avenue.
Before they had time to look around, Ryoko appeared immediately.
She had teleported from the hotel room.

"Got it. Ayeka is on the North Shore, outside Haleiwa. I can't tell if there's a house there or not."
"Thank you, Ryoko. You'll come with us?"
"Who do you think was going to get you there if not me?"
Ryoko laughed.
"The North Shore is far. The other side of Honolulu. If you were hitchhiking, the night would be over before you arrived."
"Is Ayeka-san all right?"
Tenchi couldn't settle down.
That scream was stuck in his ears and wouldn't leave.
"I don't know. Please, Ryoko. Put my mind at ease!"
"Ayeka is fine. Both Ayekas."
Ryoko soothed Tenchi with a pat on the shoulder.
"She's just a little worse for wear. Still trapped in the snare. It might be a bit dicey… if we don't find her soon, the spiritual form will go first."
"What do you mean? A snare?"
"Explanation later, Tenchi. You want to save Ayeka, don't you?"
"Yeah…"
Tenchi nodded reluctantly.
"Then let's go. Washu, what are you doing?"
"Me? I'm going back to the hotel. I have no idea when I might need to return to the lab, and keeping vigil-Ayeka is something I've left entirely to Katsuhito-dono."
"Vigil-Ayeka!"
Ryoko burst into laughter.
"She'll be angry if she hears that. She really is one, though. Good thing she's unconscious."
"Ryoko!"
Tenchi was genuinely about to get angry.
How can they be so cheerful when Ayeka-san is in trouble?
She really is a pirate at heart.
Laughing at someone else's misfortune!
"Sorry about that, Tenchi."
Ryoko left the laughter behind and took Tenchi's arm.
"She's an idiot… came all the way to Hawaii and still has only been shopping once. A little less rigid and a little more skill with men, would be my advice. Right?"
Ryoko teleported without waiting for Tenchi's reply.
The two figures vanished before Washu's eyes.
"Pot calling the kettle black." Washu murmured with amusement.

"From my perspective, it's six of one and half a dozen of the other. Isn't that right, Ryoko-chan?"
Washu stared for a little while at the darkness where the two had disappeared, then turned on her heel and headed briskly in the direction of the hotel.
"Good grief, another sleepless night. Even the greatest genius in the universe needs sleep."
Until Ryoko, Ayeka, and Tenchi come back safely—I'll be working without rest.
Surely, that must be karma for something… Washu thought.
That's fine—I'll have the debt repaid in full later.
Afternoon naps at the Hawaii research branch.
Research in progress—no unauthorized entry.
In Washu's genius mind, she could already see what lay ahead.
The scene of the Masaki household residents coming and going in and out despite the no-entry sign…
It was quite a pleasant scene.
Before returning to her room, Washu stopped at the ABC Store in the grounds and bought a mountain of onigiri, Spam musubis, and instant miso soup for herself and the Masaki household.

Ryoko and Tenchi, having teleported to the North Shore, stood for a moment looking around at their surroundings.
The sound of the waves echoed loudly.
Compared to Honolulu, which was bright and lively even at night, this place felt dark and even desolate.
"Found it! Knew it'd be here."
What Ryoko pointed to was a single beach house.
Built facing the sea, it was a relatively large single-story structure, but there was no light and no sign of anyone being there.
Moving closer, it became clear that it was more run-down than it had looked from afar.
The door was hanging half-open and swaying in the wind with its hinges broken, and most of the paint had peeled off.
"Ayeka-san is in a place like this?"
Tenchi cautiously stepped inside.
"There's no light."
He had no choice but to look around the living room by starlight.
The layout, the home bar, the rattan sofa—everything looked just as it had in his dreams.
"Hold on."

Ryoko apparently had good night vision and was rummaging through kitchen drawers.
"Here. This'll help you see a little."
Ryoko returned with a candle in a tin can.
The field of vision suddenly expanded.
"This is it! No question!"
Tenchi couldn't help shouting.
"I was sitting on this sofa drinking a cocktail. Pamela was at that home bar, and the curtain was swaying in the open window…"
Tenchi suddenly cut off his words.
"Where's Ayeka-san? Where is she?!"
"As I thought."
Ryoko said with irritation.
"Tenchi. Ayeka's spiritual body was definitely here. But it looks like she's been taken… to a different time."
"A different time?"
"Tenchi, think back to the most recent dream you saw here. What was the room like? Was it as dilapidated as this?"
"No…"
I just saw it this morning, Tenchi thought.
It was nothing like this then.
The curtains were pure white and the room was full of light.
A house left empty for a year falls into disrepair, they say—but how many years had this house been left empty?
"Ryoko, how am I supposed to go back in time?"
Tenchi said, as if spitting the words out.
"I'm a flesh-and-blood human being. That's impossible! Besides, what time was Ayeka-san taken to? What day was it? Even if I could go back in time, if I don't know that, there's nothing I can do!"
"Tenchi, you misunderstand. The dead person's time is stopped at that moment. It's not that we go to the past—when the spirit appears, the past is recreated. What you saw was probably…"
"I don't understand!"
Tenchi turned away and, holding the candle, walked around the room looking for any clue.
The darkness beyond the candlelight seemed filled with a grudge.
Something had happened in this house.
Something terrible…
Tenchi entered the bedroom.
A part he hadn't been able to see in the dream.

The bedroom was even more dilapidated than the living room.
It looked as if someone had started clearing out the room and then fled in the middle of it.
Then, something on the floor reflected the light.
Tenchi crouched down and moved the candle closer.
Shards of broken glass.
Under the glass was an old photo frame.
Tenchi, forgetting his fear for a moment, picked up the faded photograph.
Batu in a white tuxedo and Pamela in a wedding dress stood side by side in front of the beach house.
A clear sky, strong sunlight, and the two of them smiling happily.
Tenchi turned the photo over.
The date showed seven years ago in June, and scrawled on it were the words: Our Hale Kū lani.
"Ryoko!"
Tenchi called out.
I wish I hadn't seen this… this house was their final home.
It started here and ended here, probably… a story I don't know, of those two.
Just then, against the dark sea, blood-soaked blonde hair materialized.
The woman slowly raised her face, saw Tenchi, and smiled.
"You came, boy."
Tenchi's spine froze and he couldn't move or open his mouth.
"I wanted you to come. You have the black hair and black eyes of the singer I was fond of. I want you to change my fate. My cursed fate… something unlike an ordinary human dwells within you. I'm sure you can do it."
"Is that Pamela?!"
Ryoko cried out.
The blood-soaked woman—Pamela's form—swayed as she drew closer to Tenchi.
"Help me! Save me from my cursed fate! I am trapped in the wheel of fate. I can go nowhere… I can return nowhere… I'm trapped in a terrifying circle."
Pamela's voice was tinged with anguish.
"I don't know a thing about your fate!"
Tenchi couldn't help retorting.
"Where's Batu? Your husband took Ayeka-san away. What does that have to do with us? We have nothing to do with you two!"
"Is that what you want to say?"
Pamela's expression changed completely.

"He's unfaithful but jealous—the worst possible man. Is Ayeka what you call the girl there? Then all the more reason to listen to what I say. I'm the only one who can take you to where he is."
Pamela's ice-blue eyes narrowed slowly.
Cold—a freezing expression of hatred.
Tenchi recalled that this was the face he had glimpsed for just a moment inside the smiling expression.
"Is that so? He might destroy her completely. He always destroys the things he loves. This house, and me."
Pamela looked up at Tenchi cautiously.
"You're trying to make a deal?"
"That's right, boy. You catch on quickly."
Pamela licked her red lips.
"No!"
Ryoko's sharp voice made Tenchi turn around.
"I can't trust what you say, Pamela. You're Batu's wife, aren't you? To me it only looks like you two are working together. If you have any proof otherwise, show me."
"Shut up, you hussY!"
Pamela flew into a rage.
"Go ahead and watch as that sweet girl's soul is torn to pieces and she dies. She'll never come back to you. I know best. What happens when you make Batu angry."
"Stop! I'll go!"
Tenchi shouted.
"Ayeka-san is someone precious to me. It's my fault for not protecting her. I'll do whatever you say… so please, take me to Ayeka-san!"
"Good boy. That's what a man should be."
Pamela mocked Ryoko from right under her nose.
"I'll tell only you the key. It's a long way from Haleiwa to Honolulu. By the time you manage to find it, everything will be over and I'll be laughing at Hale Kulani. I won't let anyone interfere."
Suddenly a blue-white spark crackled through the bedroom, and in that instant Tenchi and Pamela had vanished.
"Wait! Tenchi!!"
Ryoko teleported and appeared in the hotel room immediately after.
"Ryoko?! Where's Tenchi-dono?"
The entire Masaki household was gathered around Ayeka's bed.
"He went off with the ghost."
Ryoko said as if spitting it out, grabbed what was left of the onigiri on the table, and roughly tore off the wrapper and stuffed it in her mouth.

"Not Batu—Pamela. The blonde woman appeared and talked Tenchi into it. Said she'd take him to Ayeka."
She stuffed in one more the same way.
"Why didn't you go?"
"I couldn't synchronize in time!"
Washu's tone wasn't particularly accusatory, but Ryoko fired back.
"What am I supposed to do? If Tenchi doesn't come back, I'll…"
Ryoko let her anger loose, kicked the table over, and raised her arm in a fist to smash the window glass.
"Stop!"
Washu stood up.
"Come here, Ryoko. Aren't you forgetting something? Why did you come back here? Isn't it because you have something important to do?" Ryoko suddenly turned.
"That's right. There's a key in Honolulu. Pamela said so. She was going to tell only Tenchi…"
"Glad I set it up."
Washu murmured as she sat in front of the monitor and worked the keyboard.
"Place your hand on the Touch-on-Board and use your Astral Link. If Tenchi-dono is in this spacetime, a mark will appear on the map. I set it up in case you ever lost track of Tenchi-dono…"
"Sorry." Ryoko sulked and placed her hand on the Touch-on-Board.
She closed her eyes and concentrated her mind.
A glowing point appeared on the map on the monitor.
"Got it. Queens Hospital."
Ryoko opened her eyes sharply.
A glowing point was visible north of downtown.
"Hurry. If Tenchi-dono steps out of this spacetime, there's nothing more you can do."
"Understood." The answer came together with Ryoko's disappearance.
"Honestly, such a handful." Washu shrugged.
"Washu-san. Um…"
"You want an explanation, don't you?"
Washu turned to face Mihoshi with a weary look.
"Even Washu-chan can't explain what she can't see. When Ryoko comes back, ask as many questions as you like. What's going on and all that. What we can do now is believe and wait."
There was no more room to argue.
Mihoshi gave up and withdrew, but in her heart she hadn't quite let go.
(Queens Hospital. What on earth is going on?)

Chapter Fourteen:

Tenchi and Pamela were at Queens Hospital…

Tenchi and Pamela were standing in a room at Queens Hospital.
"What is this…?!"
The woman on the bed was emaciated, her blonde hair cropped short.
Tubes were inserted all over her body, and it seemed miraculous she was alive at all.
"This is the key—this is me!" Pamela said as if throwing the words away.
"Three years ago when Batu shot me here, I was handed around from hospital to hospital until I ended up here. My body is certainly alive. But I'm dead. Living death! Thanks to medical insurance I'm receiving this devoted nursing care, but I want to die!"
Tears spilled from her ice-blue eyes.
"A vegetable?"
"A zombie!" Pamela corrected.
"Please, kill me. My consciousness was trapped at that moment, on that day. The moment Batu's bullet lodged here." Pamela pointed to her blood-soaked temple, weeping.
"At the instant I lost consciousness, I swore to the goddess Pele. Pele is the goddess of fire and vengeance, the most powerful deity on this island. I would haunt Batu's soul for eternity as long as it wandered in this world. When I came to, my consciousness was in that house and my body was here. Since then, I've been repeating the same scene over and over, until it makes me sick. Please, help me…"
Tenchi stared blankly at the Pamela on the bed.
"What do you want me to do…" Suddenly a fierce anger welled up.

"Give Ayeka-san back to me! Do that, and I'll do whatever you say. Where is Ayeka-san?"
"Just as I told you. Batu has her locked away. Pull out that tube there and you'll meet him right away."
"Surely you don't mean…"
"Do as I say! Quickly!" Tenchi moved toward the bed and placed his hand on the ventilator covering Pamela's nose and mouth.
Then an incredible force knocked him down, and Tenchi was slammed to the floor.
"Tenchi!"
That's Ryoko's voice!
For an instant, he thought he saw Ryoko's face outside a blue-white barrier that surrounded the hospital room.
Ryoko, I'm here! Why won't you come in?!
The next moment, the hospital's white walls were gone, and the floor had changed from linoleum to parquet. Tenchi was back in the North Shore beach house.
"Was that you?! So it was you Pamela lured in!"
"Batu?!"
Slowly Batu's whole form rose from the floor.
"You tried to kill Pamela. Should've finished you off when I had the chance. So you wouldn't come sticking your nose in here!"
"Where is Ayeka-san?!"
Tenchi shouted and flung himself at Batu.
"Give her back! Give Ayeka-san back! Just as you have nothing to do with us, you have nothing to do with her either. Why did you target her? What did she ever do to you?!"
"She had everything to do with it."
Batu casually shook Tenchi off, punched him down, and pinned him to the floor.
"I've never seen a soul that beautiful. I'd do anything for Pamela. That's the kind of man I am. If you make any more noise, I'll use you as a sacrifice too."
"What… did you say?!" Batu sneered.
"I'm making her a sacrifice. To the goddess Pele. I'm going to bring Pamela back to life. Three years tied to that hospital, she's become like a zombie. She was the most beautiful of all! I want her to live, breathe with her own lungs, leave footprints in the sand with her own feet. That's the only wish of a man crawling through the depths of hell!"
Batu's eyes blazed like volcanic fire, and even the ruby pendant on his bare chest seemed to blaze with flame.
"I'm heading for Kilauea's crater right now. I'll exchange this beautiful soul for Pamela. Pele's curse can only be broken by Pele. I made one mistake, wasted a life—for me there's no other way!"

"You're the one who did it!" Tenchi screamed.
"You're going to kill Ayeka-san for that?! Completely innocent? Don't be ridiculous!"
Tenchi poured every ounce of strength into throwing Batu's hands off and leaped to his feet.
The True Lighthawk Sword appeared in his hand.
"Tell me. Where is Ayeka-san?"
He slashed the moment the words were out.
He thought it connected at the base of the shoulder, and in that instant the blade of light disappeared.
"That Doesn't work."
Batu laughed.
"What is that katana? A toy lightsaber?" He spread his arms contemptuously.
"I don't have time to play with you. Kilauea's about to awaken. So long, you little punk."
Just then, a white hand reached from behind Batu, and in an instant a ruby pendant was torn away.
"Here you go! The boy's treasure!"
Pamela raised her arm and smashed the ruby against the hearthstone with all her might.
Like blood-red blood scattering, the ruby shattered, and Ayeka appeared, wrapped in light.
"Ayeka-san!!"
Tenchi ran to Ayeka and held her tight.
"Tenchi… sama?!"
Ayeka's tightly closed eyes opened.
"You came for me?"
"Damn you! My sacrifice—!"
Batu made a horrifying face and grabbed at Tenchi.
"He's yours, Batu." Pamela's white arms wrapped around Batu.
"Let's do our usual game. The one where you shoot me dead, then press the gun barrel into your own mouth while staring into my frozen eyes."
"Pamela…?!" Pamela's arms held Batu firmly, and her eyes looked straight at Tenchi.
"Pamela, why? Don't you want to come back to life?"
"Come back to life? Why? You're in hell but I'm the one who comes back to life alone—what for? As it happens, I am alive at Queens Hospital. My brain has shrunk and makes a rattling dry sound. And you want to bring that back to life? I've had enough. I want to go to the house in heaven. Goodbye, Batu!"
That instant, a brilliant white light engulfed the darkness.

When the light subsided, Tenchi found himself standing in the bright living room he had dreamed of so many times, still holding Ayeka close.
"How's the cocktail? Did I put a little too little liqueur?"
Pamela turned around from the home bar.
On the sofa where Tenchi had sat in the dream, a dark-haired boy was sitting.
"Delicious, Pamela. Anything you make is fine with me."
The boy showed a guileless smile.
"I like you. When I sing thinking about you, I feel so happy. Will you love me? Will you wait until I'm grown up enough to come and steal you away?"
"Sure, Fernando. When you're grown up."
"Pamela, I…"
Pamela leaned over the boy and gave him a coaxing kiss.
"Just a kiss. I want to cherish you."
Suddenly the door burst open and Batu strode in.
"Pamela! What are you doing? What were you just doing?"
"He's a dear friend, Batu." Pamela's expression hardened.
"Get out! You're always bringing women home yourself! Do you think I'm made of stone? You always, always tear my heart to pieces. I'm sick and tired of it. If you won't leave, I will. Out of my way!" Pamela stood up.
"Fernando, let's go."
"Are you serious?"
Batu's eyes narrowed slowly.
"You're serious about leaving with that kid?" Batu's hand reached for the chest of drawers.
"Go ahead and try! I mean it this time. This isn't like before—no idle threats."
"Did you not hear me? I said, move."
The moment Pamela took a step forward, a gunshot tore through the living room.
Pamela, who had instantly thrown herself to shield the boy, had a spray of deep crimson scatter at her temple.
Pamela's body slowly crumpled.
A second gunshot felled the boy without a cry, and he collapsed on top of Pamela.
The gun fell from Batu's hand.
"Pamela!!"
He kicked the boy's body aside, dropped to his knees and scooped Pamela's body up.
"It's your fault. Because you wouldn't listen. Because you said you'd leave…"
(Take the gun!)
Pamela's voice flew into Tenchi's ears.
(Quickly! Make me hold it!)
There was no time to think about the meaning.

Tenchi in an instant picked up the gun from the floor and placed it in Pamela's hand.
(Thank you, boy.)
Suddenly Pamela's fingers filled with strength.
"Goodbye, Batu. I'll take your soul!"
Light came back to Pamela's ice-blue eyes.
Then Pamela's arm thrust Batu away, and the bullet pierced his brow.
Batu fell on his back with his eyes wide open and lay still.
His body grew faint, visibly, and disappeared.
(He always wanted this to be done to him.)
Pamela smiled with clarity.
(He wanted to be only mine. I, too, have now fulfilled my vow. Nothing left to hold me back…)
Pamela's body slowly faded into the light.
(Goodbye, boy. We won't meet again. I'm going to the house in heaven…)
A smile barely visible dissolved into the light, and the wind lifted the lace curtain.
The next instant, the light was gone, and Tenchi and Ayeka's souls were back in the dilapidated beach house at night.
She was gone.
Beyond time.
Past the cursed hours, to somewhere no one's hand could reach…

"It's over. Everything is over. Let's go, Ayeka-san."
"Yes, Tenchi-sama."
Ayeka's body was luminous with light, like an angel descended into the valley of death.
"I believed. That my voice would surely reach you…"
"I heard. That's why I came."
The moment Tenchi and Ayeka stepped outside, Ryoko came running up.
"Made me wait, didn't you!"
"Ryoko?!"
"I was almost going to slash this whole house apart, barrier and all."
Ryoko spread her arms and embraced both Tenchi and Ayeka at once.
"Thank you, Ryoko-san. You came for us."
"Can't have you getting involved in more trouble on me. Straight back now. To the hotel."
Ryoko turned to face Ayeka and flashed her a grin, then teleported, holding both of them tight.

Ayeka woke up in the hotel bed for the first time in two days.

"What… time is it? I'm terribly hungry."
Everyone in the room let out a cheer and rushed over.
"It's been two days. Two whole days bedridden, Sis!"
"I remember."
Ayeka sat up in bed and patted Sasami's head.
"Everyone… I'm sorry for worrying you…"
"Never mind that!"
Kiyone took Ayeka's hand and pulled her upright.
"Dawn is almost here. We only have one more day. We don't have time to say things like that."
"Here, miso soup to start with. Sorry it's just instant."
Mihoshi solemnly held out a cup and handed it to Ayeka.
"Thank you."
After two sips, sudden tears spilled and made small ripples in the miso soup.
"…How dreadful."
Ayeka sniffed back tears and snot at the same time.
"I was only thinking of myself…"

Chapter Fifteen:

At the Rainbow Lanai…

The Rainbow Lanai's morning Viking buffet was quite a hit.
Light filled every corner of the semi-open-air interior, the scents of coffee and freshly baked bread mingled, and stimulated the appetites of the Masaki household people who had eaten nothing but onigiri since the night before.
"I shall eat!"
Ayeka proclaimed loudly and returned with a tray piled high with breakfast.
"Sis, are you all right eating so much?"
"I'm perfectly fine."
Ayeka smiled and looked around at everyone's faces.
"I intend to eat heartily and make good use of today. Because I've wasted what amounts to several meals' worth of time and sightseeing."
"That's right, Ayeka-san. Today is going to be busy. Kiyone-san has made about nine plans."
"Not about nine—it is nine."
Kiyone shot a light glare back at Tenchi.
"First, this counts as one down. Next is Hanauma Bay, where you can play with the fish. I've chartered a limousine, so it'll be easy going. At noon we return to Waikiki and Ayeka-san picks six places she wants to go. The last stop is back to the hotel for the Sunset Dinner Cruise from here. Already reserved, of course. Well? Perfect, isn't it?"
"Kyo-chan, that's not fair!"
Mihoshi burst out laughing.
"I wanted to go to the Honolulu Zoo too!"
"I'll include that as one of the six." Ayeka winked at Mihoshi.
"Sasami, isn't there somewhere you want to go?"
"Kiyone-nee-chan already put it in—Hanauma Bay!"
Sasami was sitting right next to her sister, pressed close, looking as happy as could be in the world.

"Sis will love it too, I'm sure. There are lots of beautiful fish and they'll eat food right from your hand, apparently. That'll tickle, won't it?"
"Oh, is that so?"Ayeka smiled, pulling back slightly.
"There are no big scary fish, are there? Small ones are quite enough for me. Sasami, you can have as many as you like."
"No, no, no, no!"
Sasami clung tightly to her sister's arm.
"We're going together, Sis. I'm absolutely not letting go. Make sure you sit next to me at lunch. We'll eat the same ice cream. And go to the bathroom together too!"
"I'll be fine." Ayeka finally burst out laughing.
"If you cling to me that much, we can't enjoy ourselves. Your sister is all right. After all, Tenchi-sama will protect me."
"Hm, what?!"The subject suddenly dropped on him, and Tenchi looked up in surprise.
"My, my…"Kiyone started grinning.
"Oh my…"Mihoshi's cheeks flushed pink.
"Lucky devil."Nobuyuki sent a cheer along with the sausage stuck on his fork.
"Mm."Katsuhito nodded in satisfaction.
"Tch."Ryoko burst out laughing as if she'd given in.
"Fine. Just for today, I'll yield."
"I gratefully accept." Ayeka bowed elegantly.
"Come then. Today we shall play to the fullest!"
"Oh, dear…" Tenchi's quiet murmur was far too quiet for anyone to hear.

Just as Ayeka had declared, the nine plans were completed in order, and only the sunset cruise remained.
"Now I'll go and get changed, so please go on ahead to the meeting place."
"Yes yes, understood. Mihokiyo-dono, thank you. Ayeka-dono, don't be late."
Washu answered with a knowing look and sent the members who didn't need to change ahead.
Waiting at the meeting place for thirty minutes.
At last, Ayeka appeared.
"Ahhh…"
Tenchi let out an involuntary sigh.
Ayeka came walking quietly with her two attendants, in a rose-colored dress with pearl-colored pumps, a matching handbag, her hair tied up high, and a diamond pendant sparkling at her widely open neckline.
"Here you go, Tenchi-san. I'm handing over your princess."
Kiyone smiled and exchanged a glance.

"This is a work of art made with all of Kyo-chan's effort. It's a one-of-a-kind piece, so please handle it with care." Mihoshi lightly pushed Ayeka's shoulder toward Tenchi.
"Um, thank you very much…" Tenchi was so nervous he stumbled over his words.
"I am in your care." Ayeka elegantly extended her left hand.
"I-I beg your pardon?" Tenchi looked around in bewilderment.
"Stupid. Take her hand and help her up those steps." Washu whispered in a voice barely suppressing laughter.
"Well then, if you'll permit me." Tenchi steeled himself and took Ayeka's hand.
If I'd known she was going to come dressed like this, I'd have done something more about myself. Tenchi glanced down at his own clothing—aloha shirt and ordinary slacks.
"Tenchi-sama looks fine just as he is." Ayeka smiled.
"I've heard that proper attire for men in Hawaii is an aloha shirt. I wanted you to see this dress, Tenchi-sama, and asked Kiyone-san and Mihoshi-san to help me at some inconvenience to them. These shoes and bag are borrowed from the two of them."
"Is that so."Tenchi nodded clumsily.
"Ayeka-san… you look beautiful. I was genuinely surprised."
How surprised Tenchi was, his expression conveyed more richly than his inadequate words.
"Tenchi-sama."Ayeka suddenly cut off her words. The ship had begun to move.
Beneath the darkening sky, the twin-hulled cruise ship slid quietly away from the pier, gained speed, and entered what was perhaps the most beautiful scenery on Earth.
"Tenchi-sama." Ayeka murmured once more, with all the weight of her feelings.
Ayeka's heart was more eloquent in her expression than in any short words.
"Ayeka-san…" Tenchi's feelings… needed no words.
At that climax, Ayeka gently closed her eyes.
Tenchi thought his heart might stop.
There was no going back now.
He could only go forward.
The twilight was just right to hide the two faces from others' eyes.
Or perhaps it was setting them off.
Not knowing whether it was happiness or lack of sleep, Tenchi's mind empty of thought, he drew Ayeka close and kissed her.
"Damn it. Shouldn't have given in…"
Ryoko muttered as she pulled Washu's crab-claw buns in retaliation.
The parts of the claw-bun that served as legs were just the right length for retaliatory pulling.
"That hurts, Ryoko!" Washu slapped Ryoko's hand with a grin.
"It's just a kiss. Nothing is lost by it."

"Women who look good in dresses have it easy." Ryoko grumbled.
"I'm suited for a battle suit anyway."
"Come on, Ryoko-chan. At least let her have this one day."
"I Gave up too much." Ryoko stood up.
"Sake! I'm going to drink myself senseless tonight!"

Afterward at dinner, the sleep-deprived Tenchi had collapsed on Ayeka's lap and fallen fast asleep… that became the epilogue of the trip.
Then a drunk Ryoko jumped into the sea and caused a great commotion for that epilogue.
That Katsuhito, Mihoshi, Kiyone, Sasami, and Ayeka had endured unspeakable hardship to drag the still-fast-asleep Tenchi and the still-loudly-singing-despite-being-drunk Ryoko all the way back to the hotel room—this too was a part of the epilogue.
All the while, Nobuyuki alone kept rolling the video camera, providing the Masaki household's meritorious protector throughout the trip with precious footage.

George, who had watched the enormous amount of video footage and heard every detail from Washu, bowed his head deeply.
"Master. I am most relieved that all of the Masaki household returned safely."
"Yes, well."
Washu answered with a somewhat guilty tone.
"It was a perfect holiday with not a thing more that could be added—full of love, thrills, and suspense."
The Hawaiian holiday would thus linger long in the memories of the Masaki household.

Now, let us tell the true epilogue.
The incident of Pamela Castille, a patient in the critical care ward at Queens Hospital who had been in a vegetative state for three years, disappearing—caused quite a stir for a time among Honolulu enthusiasts.
A witness—a nurse—described it as watching a film shot at high speed.
She said she saw the body shrink before her eyes, then crumble from the tips of the hands and feet like sand, and finally vanish entirely.
Glenn Austin, a parapsychologist living in Hawaii, went so far as to fax a copy of a newspaper article to Nobuyuki, and asked him this:
"What do you think, Nobuyuki? Surely it couldn't be that your consultation matter was connected to this mysterious incident… could it?"
"I don't know, Glenn." Nobuyuki answered, "Only the goddess Pele knows the truth. … That's the magic of the southern island."

—(End)—

Afterword

To all of you who always support Tenchi—thank you.
At last the time has come to deliver the ninth book to you here.
The ninth volume already (!)—isn't it something.
Looking back, I'm filled with deep emotion.
Tenchi and the others have been to all sorts of places.
They went to space, and they went to a fantasy world.
And yet why is there no story about them going to Hawaii?
That's exactly what this book is about.

The eternal summer paradise, Hawaii—actually, the author has been there twice herself, but she certainly didn't have adventures anything like Tenchi and the others had—of course not.
It was just an ordinary family trip.
Even so, that particular blue of the sky in the tropics, the blue of the sea, the freshness of the wind—these lure the author pleasantly into dreams.
Ah, I want to go again…

Since we've come all this way to Hawaii, Tenchi and the others are a bit more fired up than usual, in this volume.
While writing with the thought that each member of the Masaki household could go home with happy memories, I also poured in some of my own personal regrets (?) about things I wanted to do, places I wanted to go—and the Hawaii story came together in this form.
Did you feel the breath of paradise?

Now, this time, to match the elevated mood of Tenchi and the others, I included a rather dark love story.
The truth is I enjoy these kinds of dark (and intense) stories.
The story of love and hate between Pamela and Batu is something I can't say I've managed to write fully, but I believe the two have left the earthly prison and found their way to the house in heaven.

I wonder if one day, when Tenchi and the others are grown up, they will understand that there are love stories of that kind too.
I was drawn to the sound of the word Hale Kulani and used it many times in this story.
Hale = house, ku = like, worthy of, lani = heaven—so it apparently means something like "a place worthy of heaven."
It is in fact also the name of a hotel.
The hotel Tenchi and the others stayed at was not Hale Kulani (there are plenty of hints scattered throughout, so please try to figure it out), but I feel a little sorry I couldn't let them relax there more.

Finally, there are some words I absolutely must say here, borrowing this space.
To the readers who are waiting for a new Tenchi story.
I wrote this story with my heart, for you.
To the readers who have written me letters.
I am truly sorry that I have been unable to write back.
I cannot put into words just how much courage you gave me.
And to all who love Tenchi.
This year, the TV series (which I believe will already be broadcasting by the time this book comes out) and the film await.
I hope you each enjoy your own Tenchi world.

May you find your own Hale Kulani.

From the author—addicted to Flamenco and caffeine

Naoko Hasegawa